ALL ABOUT HISTORY

# GREEK MYTHOLOGY

## EXPLORE THE RITES AND RITUALS OF THE ANCIENT GREEKS

Meet
the gods
& goddesses
of Mount
Olympus

**Digital** Edition

FUTURE

EIGHTH
EDITION

# Welcome to
# GREEK MYTHOLOGY

Ancient Greek myths and legends have been told through the written word on the pages of great books, poems, plays and film scripts, the imagery on pottery, artists' canvasses and sculptures and even through spoken word throughout history. The tales that have captivated many a mind have served as great moral triumphs and lessons and have highlighted the many pitfalls, imperfections and crucial mistakes of the infamous gods, goddesses and heroes of whom they are based upon. The Book of Greek Mythology will explore the origins of mythology in Ancient Greece and how the belief systems in Greece shaped their society into one of the greatest empires in history. It will also look at the influence and impact of the great legends on both the Ancient Greek people and the many great minds that have drawn inspiration from them in the thousands of years since. Fact will be separated from the fiction and the stories explored as we discover the legend of Mount Olympus and the Underworld, the divine deities; Zeus, Aphrodite, Hera, Hades and Persephone and the great beasts; Scylla, Pegasus and Cyclops. Finally, we will find out how the tall tales have weathered over time with the intellectual breakthroughs in philosophy and psychology and exactly what their lasting legacy looks like today.

FUTURE

# GREEK MYTHOLOGY

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Printed in the UK

**Distributed by** Marketforce, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5HU
www.marketforce.co.uk Tel: 0203 787 9001

**Greek Mythology Eighth Edition (AHB4907)**
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London Stock Exchange
(symbol: FUTR)
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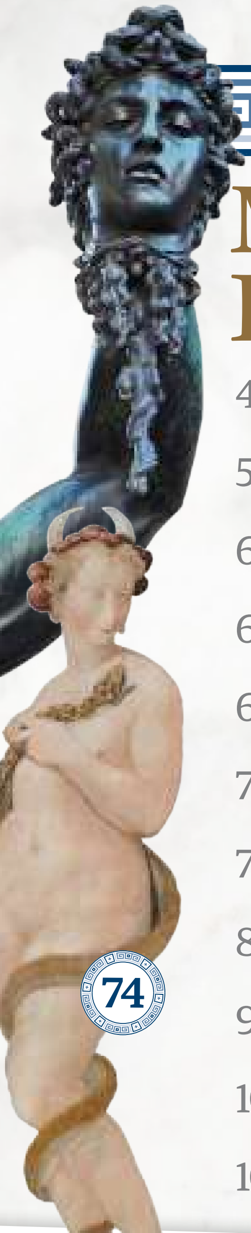

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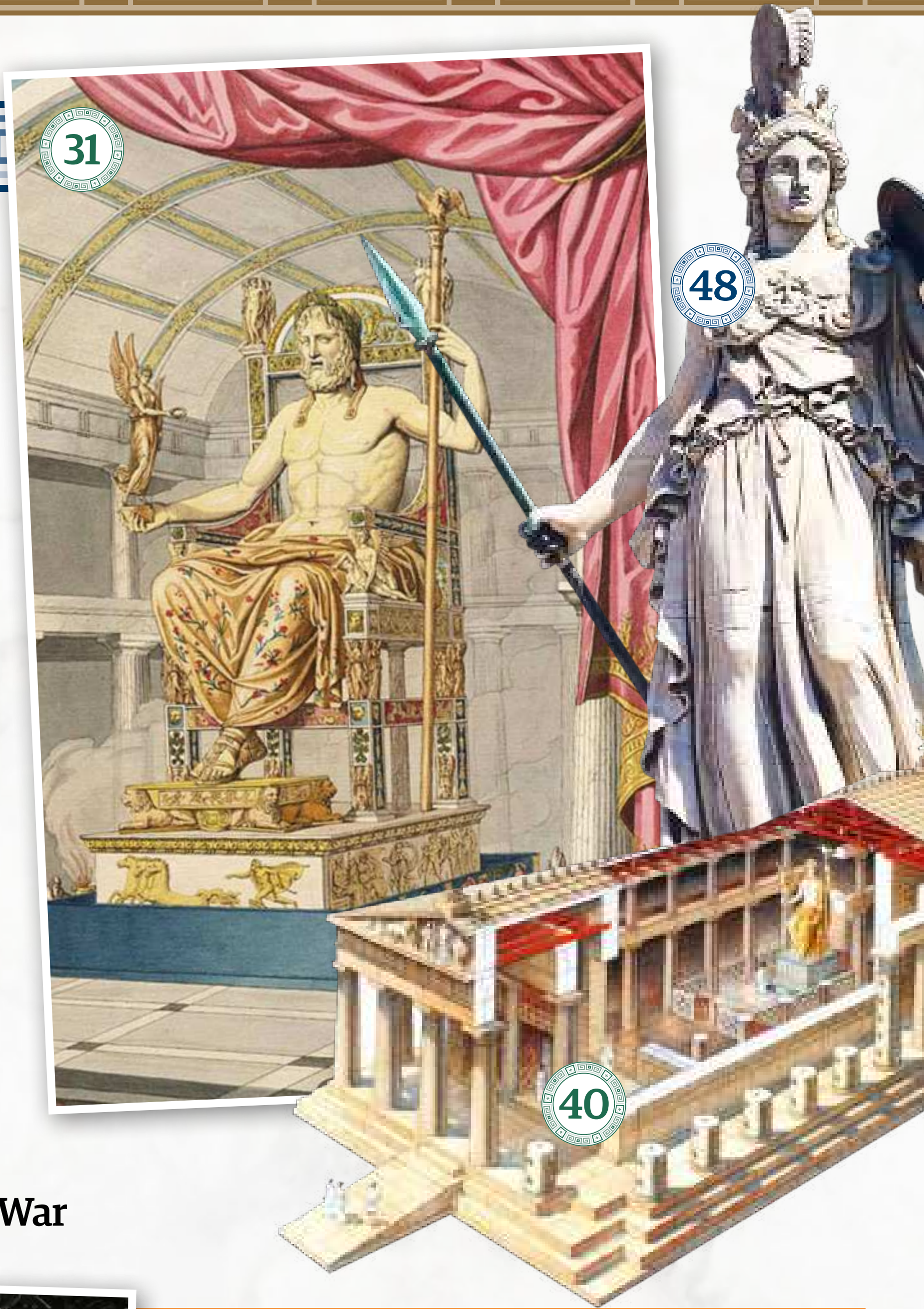

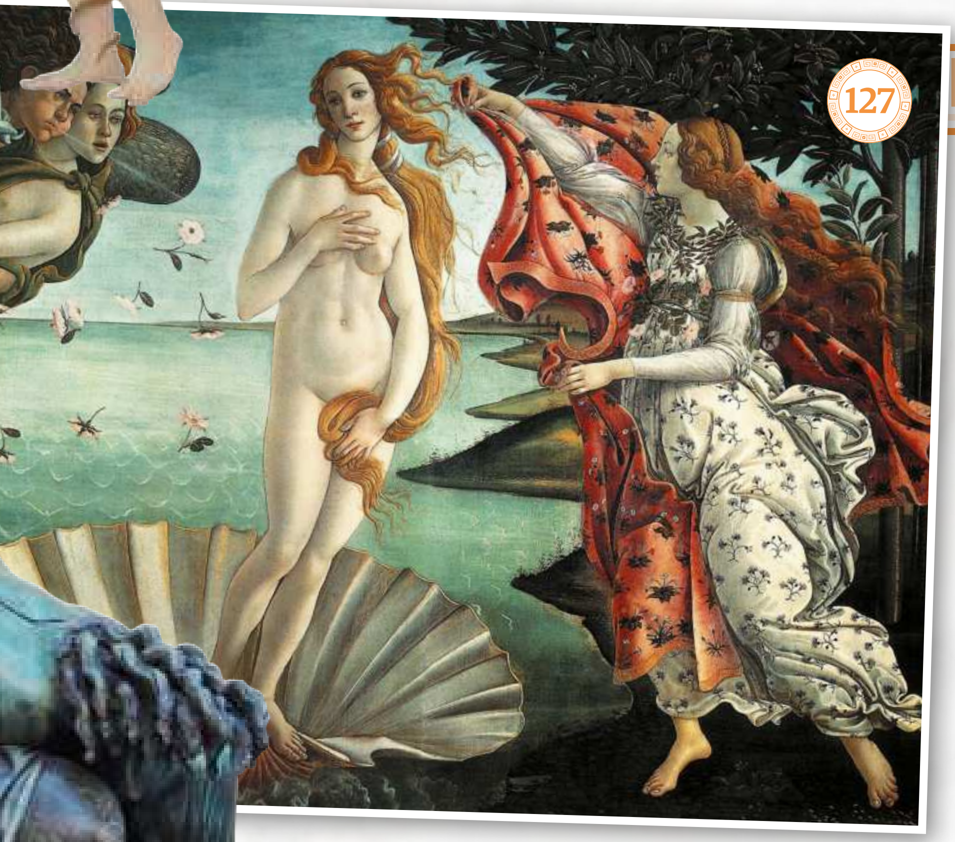

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# LIFE & SOCIETY

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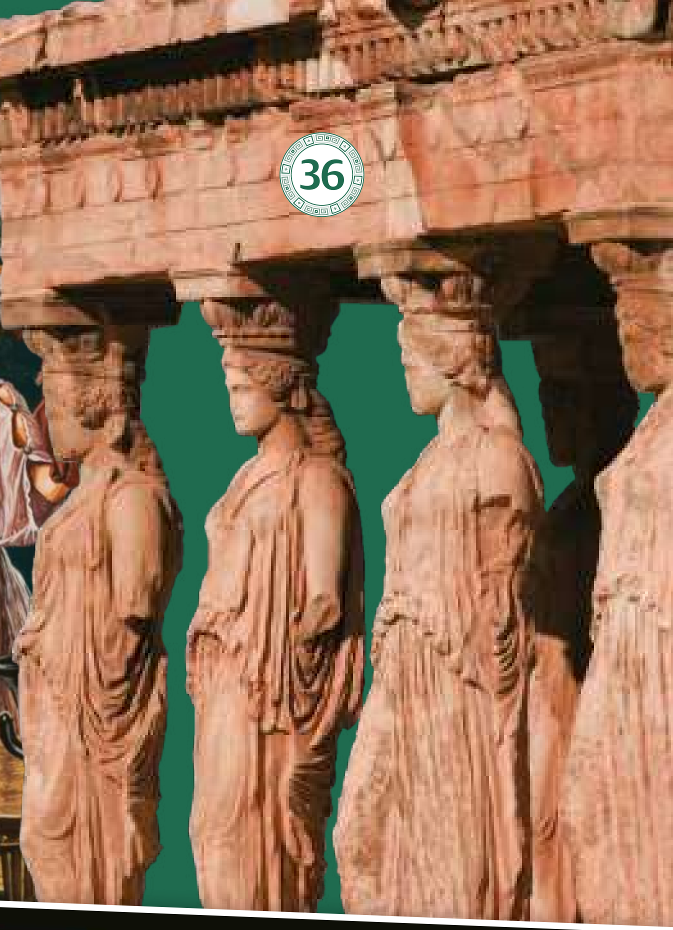
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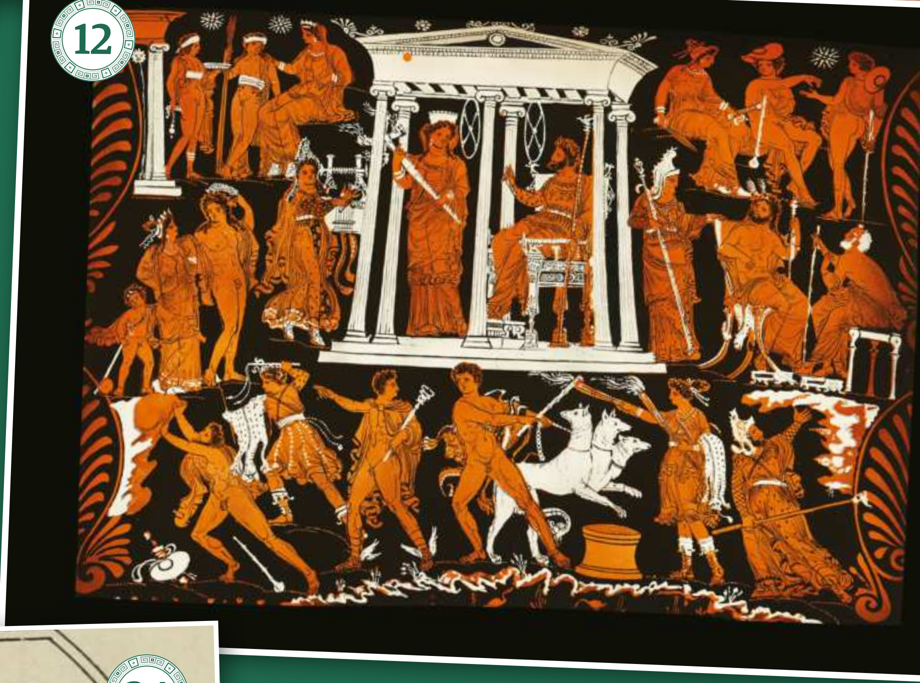
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# ANCIENT GREECE

A small land that gave the world so much, Ancient Greece continues to influence and inspire over 2,000 years on

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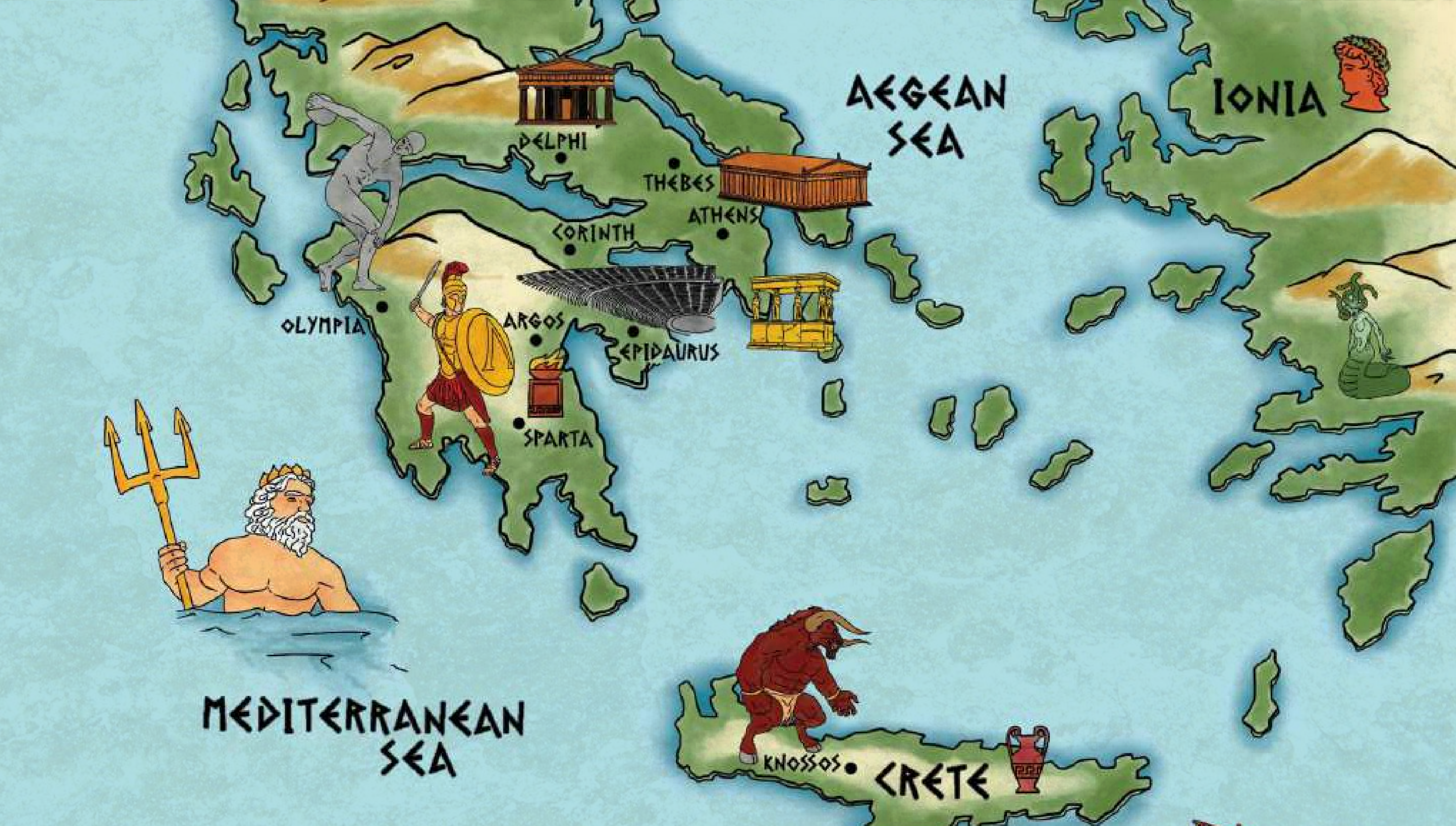
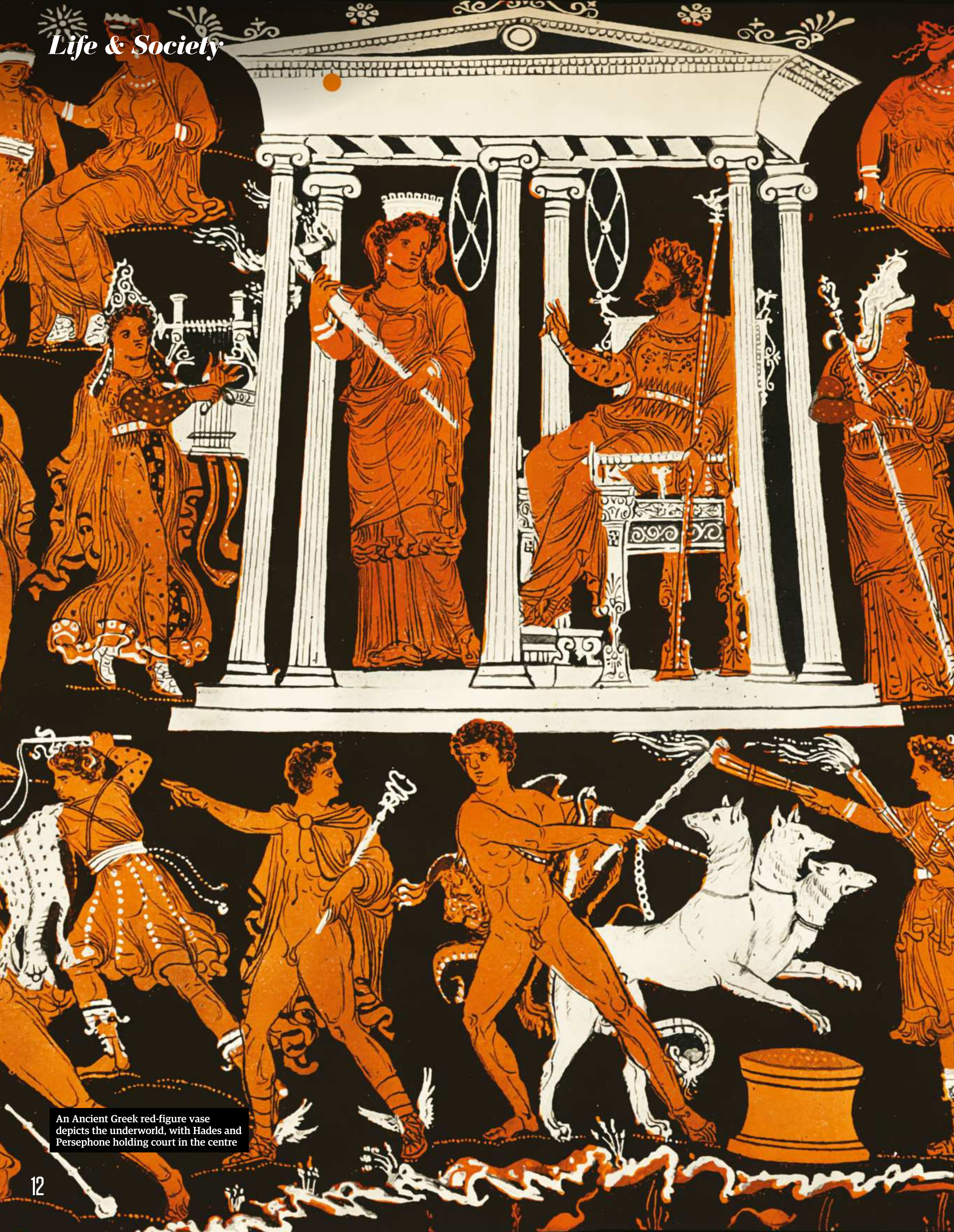
MACEDONIA
MOUNT OLYMPUS
DODONA
TROY


AEGEAN SEA
IONIA
DELPHI
THEBES
ATHENS
CORINTH
OLYMPIA
ARGOS
EPIDAURUS
SPARTA
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
KNOSSOS
CRETE

An unremarkable land of mountains, rugged countryside, idyllic islands and clear blue seas, Ancient Greece would go on to have a huge impact on the world as we know it today. For this small nation would give rise to the principles of democracy, concepts of philosophy, key advances in art and architecture, vital scientific and mathematical discoveries, the birth of the Olympic Games and so much more - many of which still remain relevant to this day. It was also home to some of history's greatest minds and most fearsome warriors, not to mention a pantheon of gods and a catalogue of myths and legends like no other. Over 2,000 years later this small ancient land and its remarkable history continue to fascinate, intrigue and inspire us.

> "An unremarkable land that would go on to have a huge impact on the world as we know it today"



An Ancient Greek red-figure vase depicts the underworld, with Hades and Persephone holding court in the centre

# THE BEGINNINGS OF ANCIENT GREECE

From the dark beginnings of human civilisation, Greece has been a fascinating country on the forefront of human development in the West

Ancient Greece, with its myriad of different cultures and peoples, has long been seen as the cradle of Western civilisation. Having reached the heights of almost all aspects of human learning, Greece was at the heart of the ancient world, and formed the basis for much of Western society's science, politics, philosophy and drama, as well as the Olympic Games, the Latin alphabet and historiography.

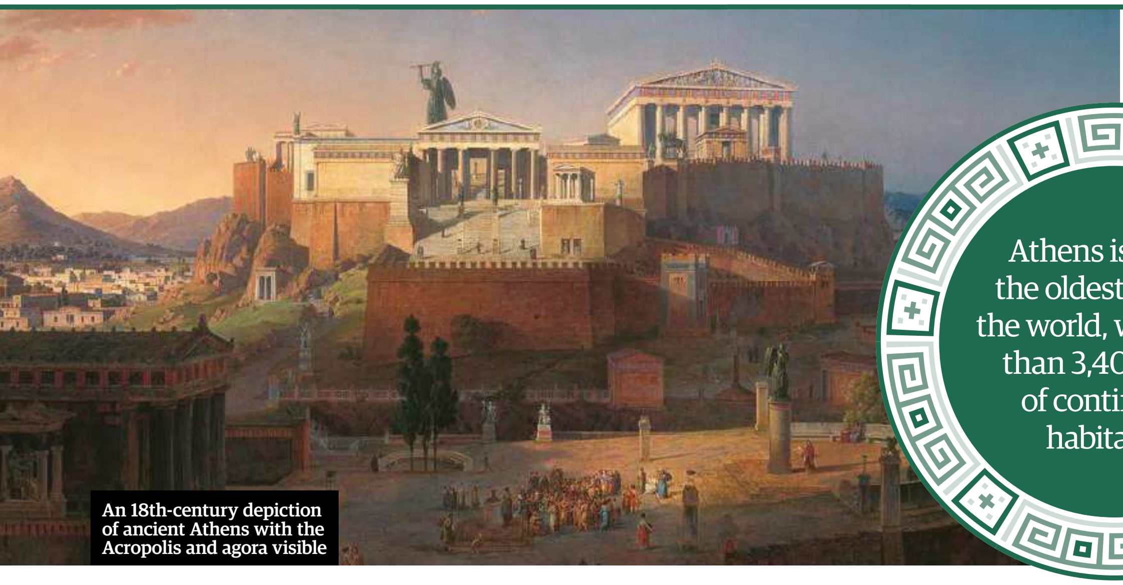
It is worth noting that the Ancient Greeks, as well as modern-day Greeks, do not refer to their country as such, rather calling it Hellas. The name comes from the mythical progenitor of the Greek race, a man named Hellen. It is not known when Hellen is supposed to have been born, or even if he existed, and he shouldn't be confused with Helen of Troy.

The mixing of myth and legend, especially in the early years, was not uncommon in the Greek world. Today we have a great many explanations for all manner of natural phenomena, and our understanding of science and medicine is far more advanced than those who inhabited the ancient world. For them, the divine was a way to explain the unknown, and so early Greek history is directly linked to their religious and mythical beliefs.

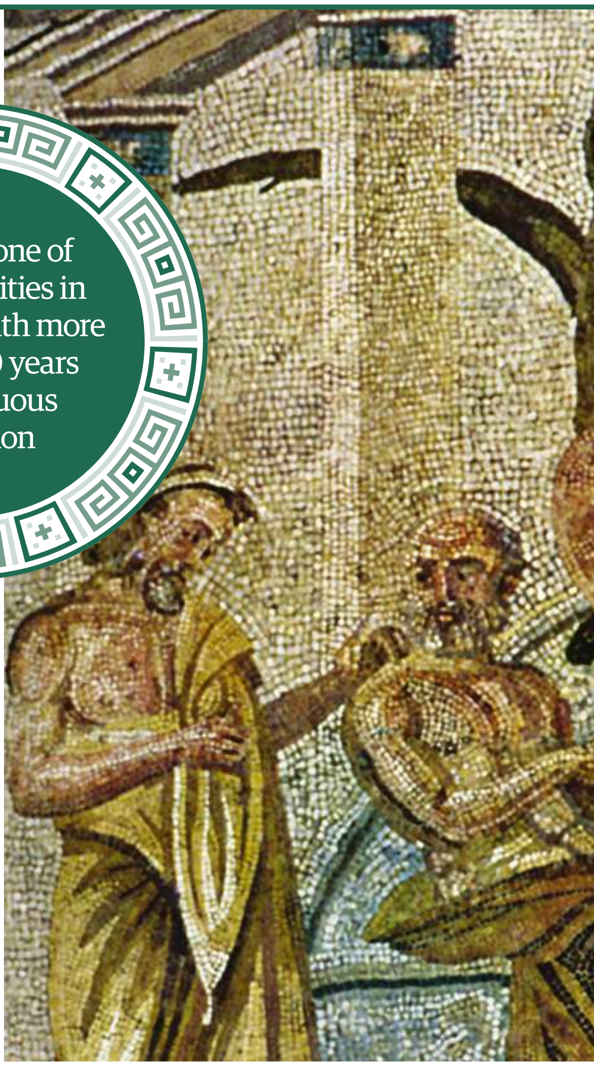
The geography of Greece can certainly be seen as an inspiration for these beliefs, with tall, majestic mountains making up 80 per cent of the landmass, but it is also home to rugged coastlines and rolling fertile plains. While offering beautiful, unrivalled views, this mountainous country made overland travel rather difficult, so the Ancient Greeks would more often than not turn to the sea for fast transportation and trade.

While connected by the sea, local communities would often find themselves isolated by the local topography, which then led to the formation of independent city-states and communities throughout the land. These settlements would be built up around a central citadel, which would offer a better vantage point to spot incoming raiders or invaders thanks to their location on high ground. These would eventually become known as acropolises, with the most famous example being that of Athens.

Archaeological finds point to human settlement in Greece dating back to the Neolithic era. The early settlers and ancestors of the Greek people migrated through Russia and down into the northern part of the country in around 4000 BCE. From this journey, the population spread across the land to found part of the Aegean civilisation, who were fishermen and traders based out of the islands of the Aegean Sea. They flourished from 3200 to 1100 BCE, and provide evidence for continued human



An 18th-century depiction of ancient Athens with the Acropolis and agora visible



Athens is one of the oldest cities in the world, with more than 3,400 years of continuous habitation

habitation of the area. Around the same time, 2700 to 1500 BCE, the Minoan civilisation came to be active on the island of Crete. Experts believe that the island was flooded after a natural disaster, and this has often pointed to the beginnings of the Atlantis myth.

Later, the Mycenaean civilisation, which borrowed much from the Minoans, began to take shape. The Mycenaeans were the first people to begin speaking Greek, and their civilisation ruled from 1650 to 1200 BCE. The later Greeks would hold them in high regard, awed by the massive stone citadels they constructed. So vast were the stones that they were named 'Cyclopean walls', after the one-eyed mythical monster, as it was thought only giants could have moved such weight. The mixing of the Minoan and Mycenaean gods and goddesses would provide the Ancient Greeks with a foundation on which they constructed their own pantheon, and the creation myth of the Olympian gods' war and victory over the Titans began in this period.

After the fall of the Mycenaeans came a period known as the Greek Dark Ages, an era that gained its name because from around 1100 to 800 BCE we have very little to tell us what happened. It was during this time that the fabled Trojan War was chronicled by Homer. While the city has been discovered, the exact details of the actual war remain fuzzy, and are so interwoven with mythology that the two have become almost impossible to untangle.

800 BCE onwards is when we begin to find the more familiar names that we associate with Ancient Greece, with the first being the oracle at Delphi. Serving as a prominent feature in Greek society for more than 1,000 years, the oracle would give divine guidance to the rulers of the various city-states on matters of war and politics.

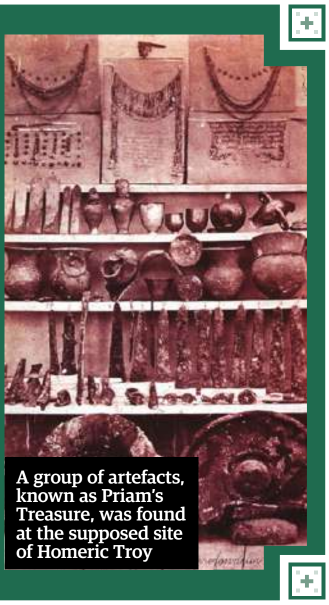
Only a few years later, in 776 BCE, the first Olympic Games was held. Although a far cry from the modern version, and despite only having one event, the event started a competitive tradition that would last until the 4th century when it was outlawed by the Romans. This is known as the Archaic period of Greek history, and it bore witness to a massive expansion in the population of the country and the

## Welcome to Troy

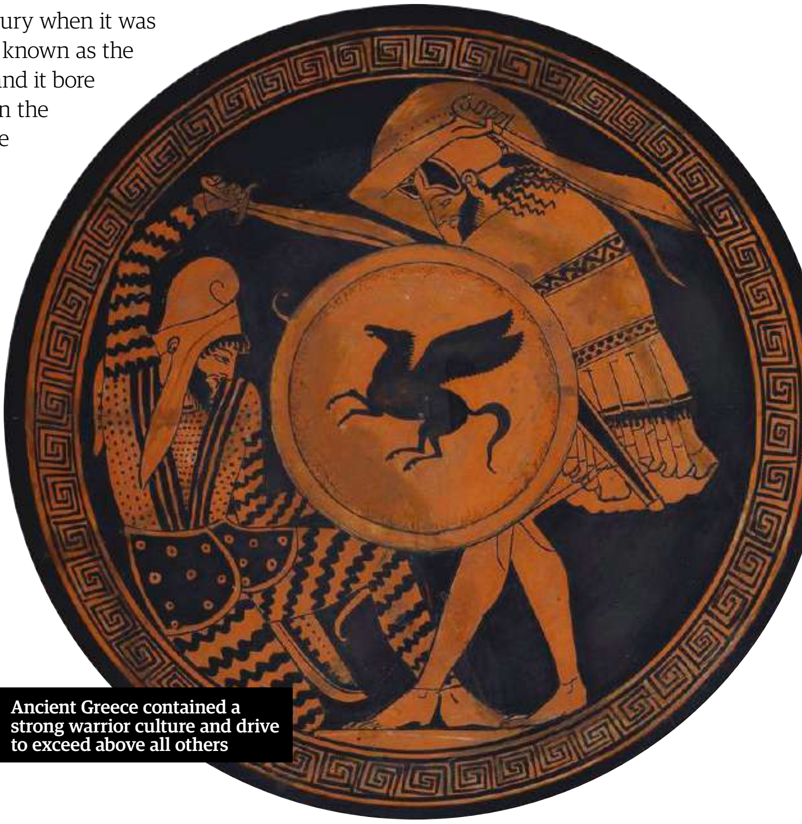
Fought between the Achaeans and the Trojans, the Trojan War is one of the most influential and well-known pieces of Greek mythology that exists. It is featured in many works of literature, most famously in Homer's *Iliad*, a tale of war, love and betrayal.

The Ancient Greeks believed the war had historical merit, but they also understood that Homer's account was filled with exaggeration and myth to improve the narrative. Modern historians and archaeologists have tried to find links in sources of other cultures, like the Egyptians or Hittites, and the consensus seems to be that the conflict took place, but the details – like the cause and outcome – are unfortunately lost to time.

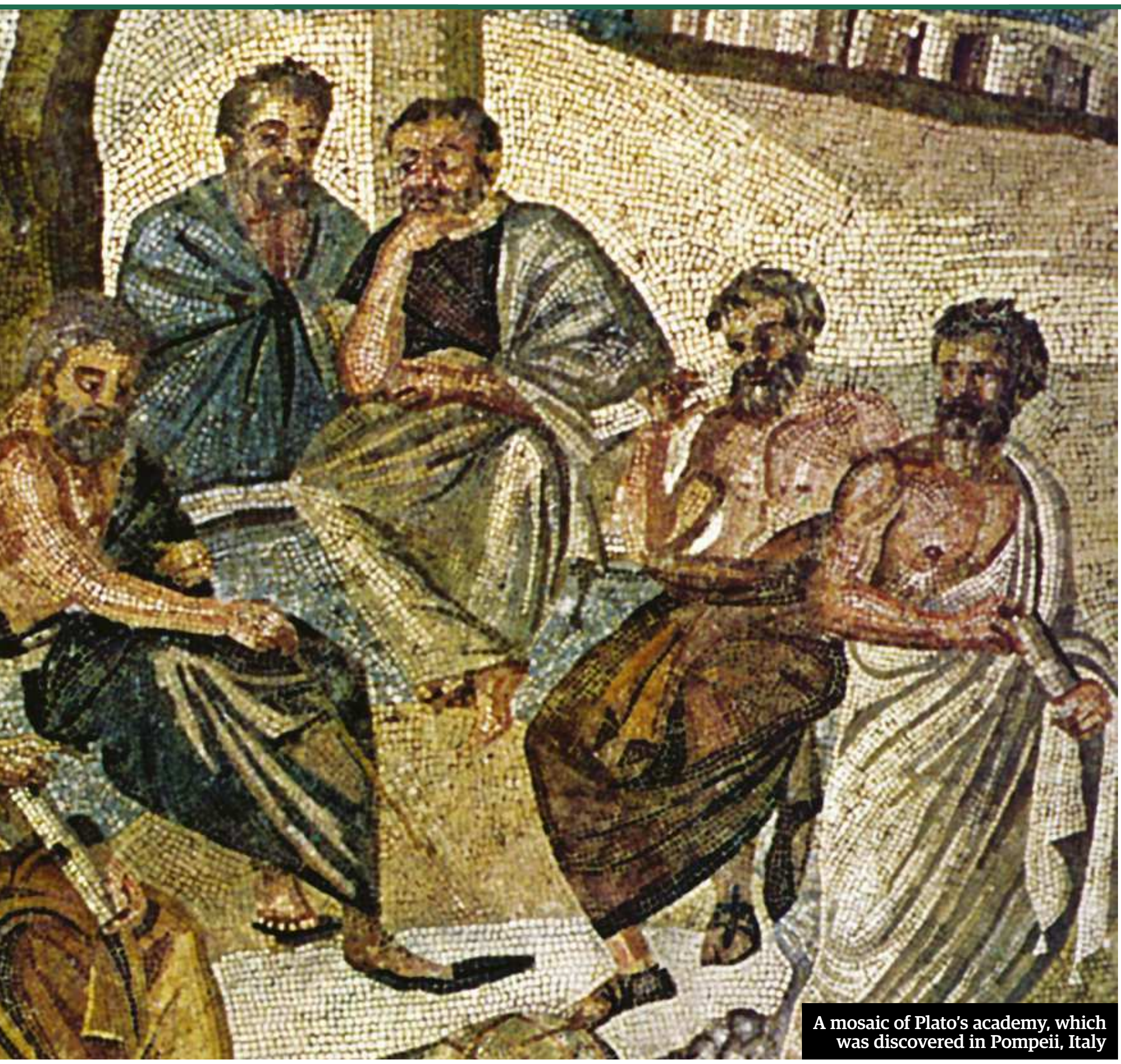
It's thought that Troy was inhabited from about 3000 BCE, but it was constantly being rebuilt, resulting in about ten layers lying one on top of the other.



A group of artefacts, known as Priam's Treasure, was found at the supposed site of Homeric Troy



Ancient Greece contained a strong warrior culture and drive to exceed above all others

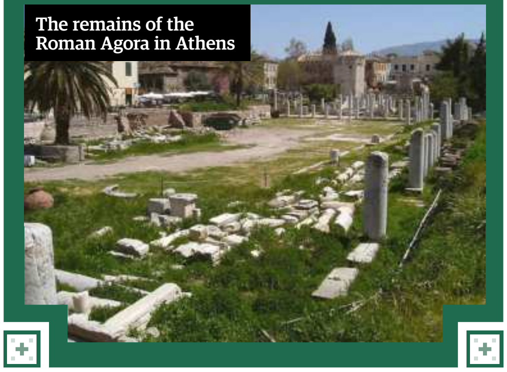


A mosaic of Plato's academy, which was discovered in Pompeii, Italy

## The Greek cityscape

While all of the Greek city-states were unique, common urban architecture would help bind them together. The cityscape of a Greek city would have been fairly similar throughout the country. In the centre of the town on a raised mound would stand the acropolis, or citadel. Religious temples would also dominate urban skylines, showing the might and importance of the places where pleas to the gods would be made, usually with sacrifices to ensure those pleas were heard.

At the foot of the acropolis would be the agora, the beating heart of the city. Political buildings would be found here, and so it served as a meeting place for the city's great and good. As the agora would be full of life, each Greek city would contain a dedicated cemetery so that the dead could always be laid to rest peacefully. For entertainment, citizens would usually have to travel to the surrounding hills, as the superior acoustics often made them prime spots for open-air theatres.



The remains of the Roman Agora in Athens

beginnings of some of its most famous events. This was also an age of colonisation for the Greeks, with settlements cropping up in all the islands of the Aegean Sea and the coastline of Asia Minor, in modern-day Turkey.

Colonies further afield were also founded, driven by the need for food, which could not come from Greece due to its lack of arable land. These included the southern tip of Italy and Sicily, the coastline around the Black Sea, and a few locations on the Iberian and African coasts. This was also the time when Greek cities would make the shift from monarchies into republics, or poleis, and they would control the surrounding land. The two great city-states, Athens and Sparta, began their rise to power during this period. Sparta is famous for its intense militaristic society, boasting to have created the toughest soldiers the world has ever seen. Meanwhile Athens is seen as the birthplace of democracy and influential philosophers.

> Poor farmland would see Greece mostly cultivate what is known as the Mediterranean triad: olive, wheat and barley

Next came the Classical period, a golden age of sorts, where grand ideas like Greek democracy really came to the forefront, and famous buildings such as the Acropolis and the Parthenon in Athens were built. It was roughly situated between the Persian invasions and the rise and fall of Alexander the Great, and the period plays host to many great names like the philosophers Socrates, Plato and Aristotle.

However, this was also a time of warfare, with the titanic Greco-Persian Wars seeing the Greek archipeligo invaded by one of the largest armies to have ever been recorded, and the Peloponnesian War, which saw the great Athenian and Spartan empires vie for supremacy over all of Greece.

It wasn't until the 4th century BCE that King Philip of Macedonia began to bind them into one cohesive unit. What Philip started would be completed by his son, Alexander - known as Alexander the Great - who crushed all resistance in his path. In Alexander's short life he would carve out a vast empire that would encompass all of Greece, modern-day Iraq and Iran, the Levant, Egypt, and reach even as far as India. Although the empire collapsed shortly after his death, it did herald the Hellenistic period, in which Greek culture was spread far and wide throughout the known world at the time.

The fall of Alexander's empire, and its subsequent carving up by his generals, laid the foundation for the rise of Rome. Around 100 years after Alexander's death, in the 2nd century BCE, the Greek city-states would fall to the military might of the Roman Republic. While Rome was a foreign invader, much of Roman culture, such as their pantheon of gods, was borrowed from the Greeks, and the Greeks still largely influenced the Romans during this time.

But while this was the fall of mainland Greece, a small pocket of Hellenistic culture, the Ptolemaic dynasty of Egypt, wasn't overthrown until 30 CE after the naval battle at Actium. So named after the Macedonian general Ptolemy, the dynasty would fall with Cleopatra VII, who would take her own life with her Roman lover, Mark Antony.

However, despite the apparent end of the Greek peoples as they were assimilated into Rome, Hellenistic culture still spread throughout the Mediterranean and paved the way for the evolution of Western civilisation that we all now know today.

# 8000-479 BCE

## Early Greek civilisation

8000-1300 BCE

Early archaeological evidence points to human habitation stretching back to the Neolithic period. Through this and the Bronze Age, the Aegean civilisation comes into being. This is a blanket term for the different groups living on mainland Greece, the Aegean Islands and Crete. With few historical records for them, we rely on archaeological and geographical findings to gain an understanding. However, we do know that trade and commerce played a large role in their survival. With farmland being at a premium in Greece, the ability to trade allows these civilisations to sustain themselves.

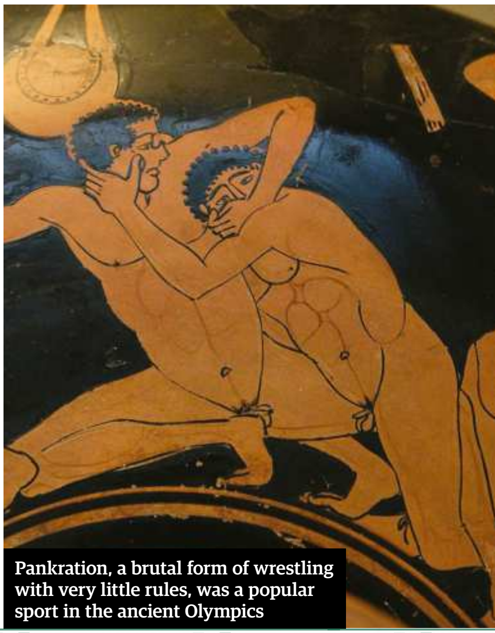
An 18th-century map of the Aegean Sea and surrounding islands

> Philosopher and mathematician Pythagoras instructed his followers not to eat beans, possibly because they contained the souls of the dead

## First Olympic Games

776 BCE

Originating as a festival to honour Zeus, the chief of the gods, the Olympic Games grow into a national pasttime that champions the competitive spirit of the Greek people. The first games only have one event, which is a sprint near the sacrificial altar, but soon grow to include many different sports, such as wrestling and chariot racing. Competitors and spectators flock to the sanctuary at Mount Olympus every four years to watch this spectacle, and it endures almost 1,000 years until it is outlawed by the Roman emperor Theodosius, who banned all pagan worship as the empire converted to Christianity.



Pankration, a brutal form of wrestling with very little rules, was a popular sport in the ancient Olympics

**Destruction of the Minoans**

Although theories are disputed, the eruption of Thera, one of the largest volcanic events in recorded history, brings an end to the Minoan civilisation, with a massive tsunami – caused by the eruption – decimating the island of Crete.

**c.1600 BCE**

**The Trojan War**

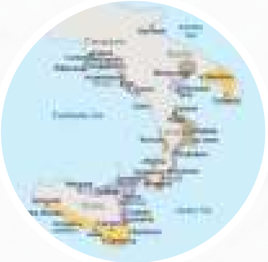
Recorded in Homer's *Iliad*, the Trojan War is a mix of myth and reality. The Greeks gain victory through deception, infiltrating the city of Troy and brutally sacking it.

**1250 BCE**

**The Greeks visit Italy**

Always on the lookout for new territory and arable farmland, Greek settlers hop over the Mediterranean and found colonies on the southern tip of Italy and in Sicily.

**750 BCE**

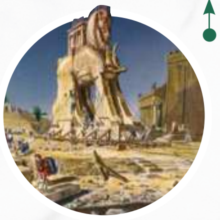


8000-1300 BCE | 1600 BCE | 1400 BCE | 1300 BCE | 1250 BCE | 1100 BCE | 776 BCE | 750 BCE | 730 BCE | 727 BCE

**The Sea Peoples appear**

Thought to have been made up of a confederacy of tribes from craggy coastlines around the Aegean Sea, the Sea Peoples are savage coastal raiders who cut a bloody swath through the Mediterranean.

**1300 BCE**



**End of Mycenaean civilisation**

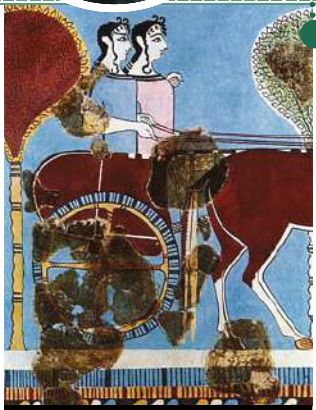
Experiencing two massive civil upheavals, the specifics of which are still being debated, the Mycenaean civilisation falls. Theories include a massive seaborne invasion or internal strife that devours the Mycenaeans from the inside.

**c.1100 BCE**

**Greek tragedy**

Hippomenes, an Athenian magistrate, displays great cruelty when he punishes his daughter's infidelity by yoking the man to his chariot until he drops dead of exhaustion. He then locks his daughter up with a horse until she too dies.

**727 BCE**

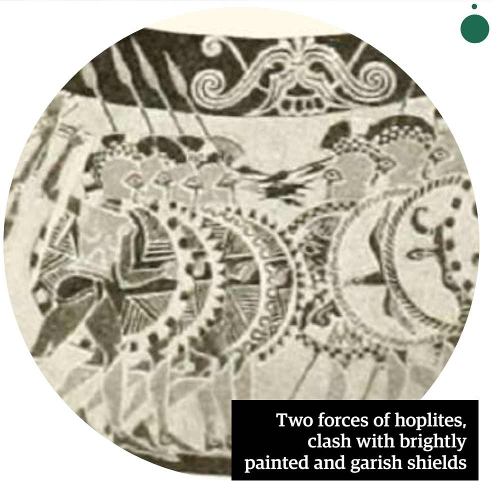


Two female Mycenaean charioteers, possibly warriors, from a fresco discovered in Pylos

## The Mycenaean civilisation flourishes

1400 BCE

The Mycenaean civilisation is a precursor to Greek civilisation. From their citadels, the elite of the Mycenaean society flourishes. They also have contact with the Minoans of Crete, and the Mycenaeans are influenced by the island culture, especially in the creation of art. The Greeks are in awe of the Mycenaeans, and coupled with advanced drainage and irrigation systems, the civilisation conducts trade throughout the Mediterranean world.



Two forces of hoplites, clash with brightly painted and garish shields

## The Messenian Wars

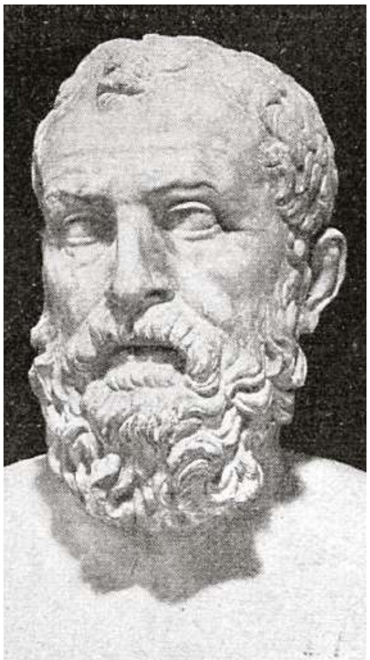
c.730 BCE

Tensions between Sparta and Messenia come to a head in the first in a series of conflicts between the two city-states. A trade deal turns bloody and then escalates into a full-scale war, but the Spartans achieve victory within a year, gaining substantial wealth as a result. Meanwhile Messenia is forcibly depopulated, with its inhabitants either willingly migrating or being enslaved by the Spartans. These slaves later try to rebel against their masters, but are swiftly dealt with.

## Democracy in Athens

594 BCE

It is the Athenian statesman Solon who champions the beginnings of democracy in Athens, and by extension the Western world. Such is his influence that he achieves an almost-mythical status in later years, and is regarded as a founding father of the city-state. During his lifetime, Athens undergoes an economic crisis where much of the arable farmland is held by a small group of aristocrats. Solon sets about restructuring the social system so that it assigns people to wealth brackets based on income. He also oversees the creation of new law codes, making the system much fairer for the majority of the population. As a result, Solon successfully lays the foundations of a political system that has since been adopted all over the world.

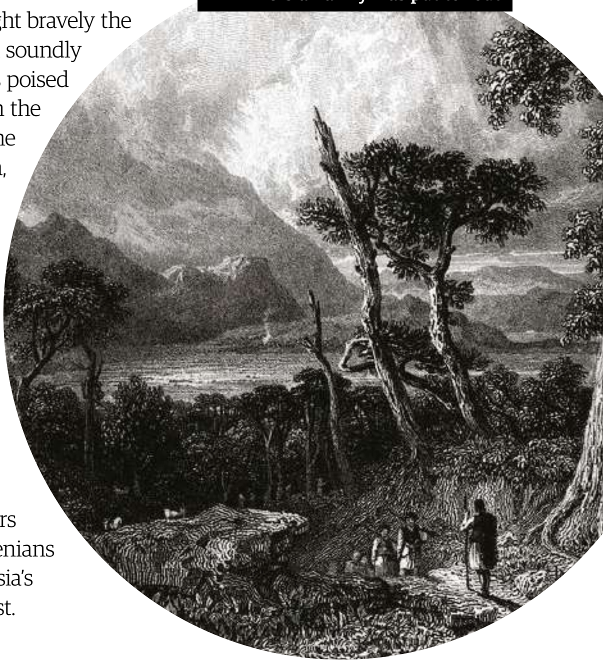


A stone bust of Solon from the National Archaeological Museum in Naples

## Battle of Plataea

479 BCE

While the Greeks had fought bravely the year before, they had been soundly defeated, and Xerxes looks poised to sweep over resistance in the summer of 479 BCE. On the northern plateau of Plataea, the two armies draw up, neither wanting to cross a river in the middle of the battlefield and break up their formations. The Persians mistake a Greek retreat for a route and charge across the river, and they are soundly defeated by the savage Spartan hoplites. Many of the Persian soldiers are slaughtered when Athenians attack their camp, and Persia's ambitions of Greece are lost.



The plain of Plataea in the shadow of Mount Cithaeron, where the Persian army was put to rout

**Athens goes potty for pottery**

Red-figure pottery becomes the new artistic trend in Athens. It is recognisable by its red figures painted on a black background, and replaces the older black-figure pottery that originated in Corinth.

**525 BCE**

**Battle of Marathon**

The culmination of King Darius' first invasion of Greece, this battle sees a smaller Greek army smashing the might of the Persian force. So damaging to Persian invasion plans, they are forced out of Greece for ten years.

**490 BCE**

**Battle of Thermopylae**

One of the most famous battles in history, Thermopylae sees 300 Spartans and 7,000 other Greeks hold a pass against overwhelming odds. The battle occurs at the same time as the naval engagement at Artemisium.

**480 BCE**

594 BCE · 580 BCE · 525 BCE · 499 BCE · 497-479 BCE · 490 BCE · 480 BCE · 479 BCE

**Vying for power**

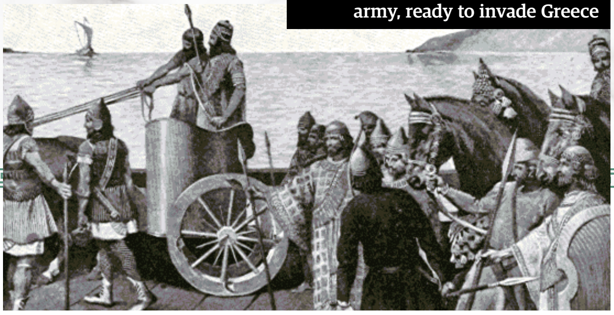
The Greek colonies in Sicily come into conflict with the Carthaginian Empire. Carthage would become famous as the city-state that took on the might of Rome but, like Greece, is ultimately unsuccessful.

**580 BCE**

**The Persian Wars**

To punish Athens and Eretria's role in the Ionian revolt, Persian king Darius launches an invasion of Greece. This also serves to remove any more destabilising Greek influences that might threaten the Persians.

**497-479 BCE**



Xerxes, ruler of the Persian Empire, crosses the Hellespont with his army, ready to invade Greece

A coin minted in Darius I's image

## Ionian revolt

499 BCE

The precursor to the Greco-Persian wars, the Ionian revolts see the Greek colonies of Asia Minor rise up against their Persian overlords. Unpopular local tyrants and bundled military operations set the scene, with mainland Greece sending supplies and men to aid their countrymen. The Ionians are the first to go on the offensive by burning Sardis, an important city in the Persian Empire. Then the Persian military machine proves to be too strong; after five years of defensive fighting, the Ionians are beaten into submission and come under the rule of the Persian kings.

## The Persians strike back

480 BCE

After the defeat at Marathon, the Persians regroup under King Xerxes, who launches another invasion of Greece. In an attempt to head off the invaders, the Greeks muster a fleet of more than 200 ships in the straits of Artemisium. The massive Persian fleet, over 1,200 strong, loses roughly one-third of its strength to stormy weather and the Greek coastline, but uses its numbers to force the Greeks back. It allows the Greeks to gain valuable insights into Persian tactics and thus shatter the aura of invincibility of the Persian war machine.

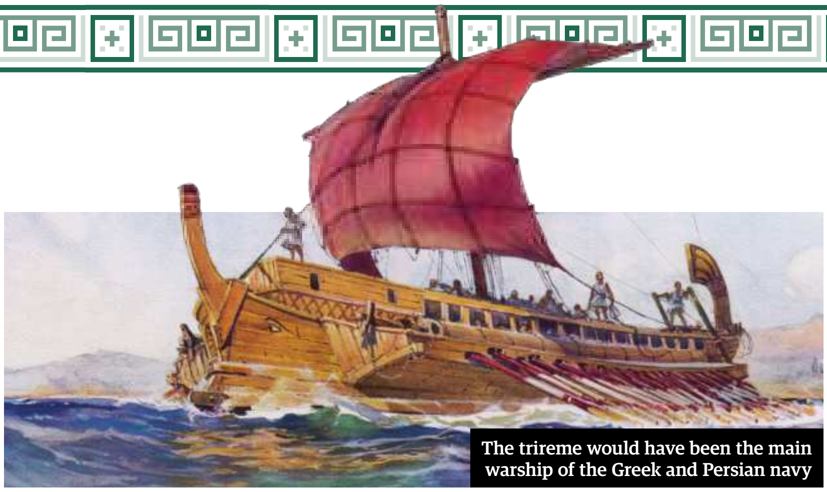
# 479 BCE – 1896

## Victory or defeat

479 BCE

After the Greek victories against the Persians, it is clear that mainland Greece is safe from future invasion. Off the back of this, Athens forms the Delian League, an alliance of hundreds of city-states that will collaborate and continue to fight the Persian Empire. While a noble cause from a Greek perspective, the Athenians soon begin to use the navy that the league had formed for its own uses. The league essentially becomes the Athenian Empire, as Athens now has the naval might to bully any wayward city-states into line. This soon brings it into conflict with its rival, Sparta.

A stone fragment of an Athenian decree detailing the collection of tribute from league members



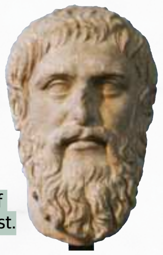
The trireme would have been the main warship of the Greek and Persian navy

## The King's Peace 387 BCE

As the Peloponnesian War saw resentment against Athens as one of its main causes, so the Corinthian War was fuelled by anger against Sparta. The conflict saw Sparta gain an early upper hand on land but decisively get beaten at sea by a Persian fleet. Subsequent territorial gains by Athens caused the Persians to ally with Sparta, which brought the remaining Greek allies to the negotiating table. The Peace of Antalcidas, or the King's Peace, sees Persia take control of all cities in Asia Minor and places like Cyprus in the Aegean. This ensures that the Persian sphere of influence can once again interfere in Greek affairs, and the peace accord – almost ironically – does not bring peace to mainland Greece, where intermittent conflicts rage for years after.

**Helot Revolt**
A devastating earthquake near Sparta is utilised by the Helots, the Spartan slave class, to rebel against their cruel masters. However, the superior Spartan warriors soon make short work of the rebel slaves.
**465 BCE**

**Birth of Plato**
Along with his teacher, Socrates, and his pupil, Aristotle, Plato lays out the foundation of Western philosophy and science. The polymath also goes on to found the Platonic Academy in Athens, the first centre of higher learning in the West.
**c.427 BCE**



**Death of Thucydides**
The author of the only full account of the Peloponnesian War, Thucydides stands side by side with Herodotus for his influence on historical narrative. He is later dubbed the father of scientific history.
**c.401 BCE**

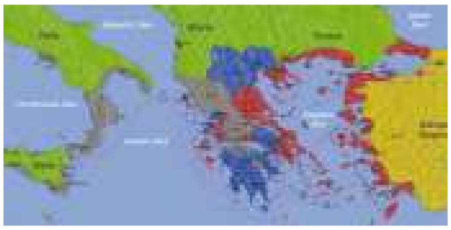
**Finding the atom**
The philosopher Democritus, known as the father of modern science, lays out his ideas of atomic theory. Although hugely influential, none of his writings and work survive with us to the modern day.
**400 BCE**

479 BCE · 465 BCE · 431 BCE · 430-429 BCE · 427 BCE · 401 BCE · 400 BCE · 387 BCE · 338 BCE

**Death stalks the streets**
An epidemic ravages the city of Athens and leaves it devastated. Accounts of lawlessness, excess and a general breakdown of morals are recorded, as the population does not believe it will survive long.
**430-429 BCE**

**Plague returns to Athens**
Just three years after the first wave of epidemics, a second wave hits Athens again. There is a range of theories as to what could have caused the outbreak, from typhus to typhoid, but the truth may never be known.
**427 BCE**

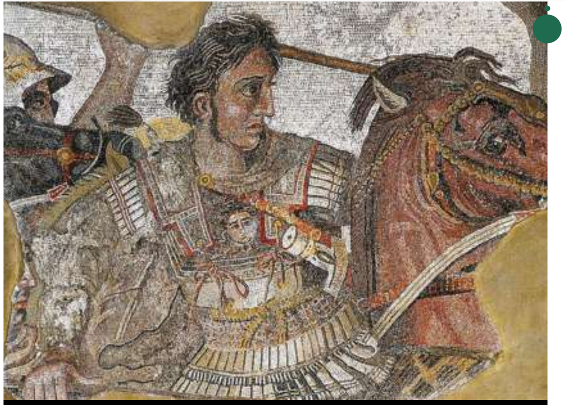
**Rise of Macedonia**
Philip of Macedon defeats the allied cities of Greece in the Battle of Chaeronea. The immediate aftermath is Macedon gaining hegemony over almost all of southern Greece.
**338 BCE**



## Start of Peloponnesian War

431 BCE

The growing power of Athens is of great concern to Sparta, but the final straw is Athens' plan to rebuild its extensive harbour fortifications that Sparta fear will push undecided city-states over to the Athenian side. The spark that ignites the conflict is over the city of Poteidaia, which falls under Sparta and its Peloponnesian League's sphere of influence. Promising protection from Athenian aggression, the situation escalates to open war. After a long conflict, the Spartans smash the Athenian navy at Aegospotami with financial help from their old enemy, Persia.



One of the most complete depictions of Alexander the Great from the *Alexander Mosaic*. However, he is described in historical sources as having blond hair rather than black

## Conqueror of the known world

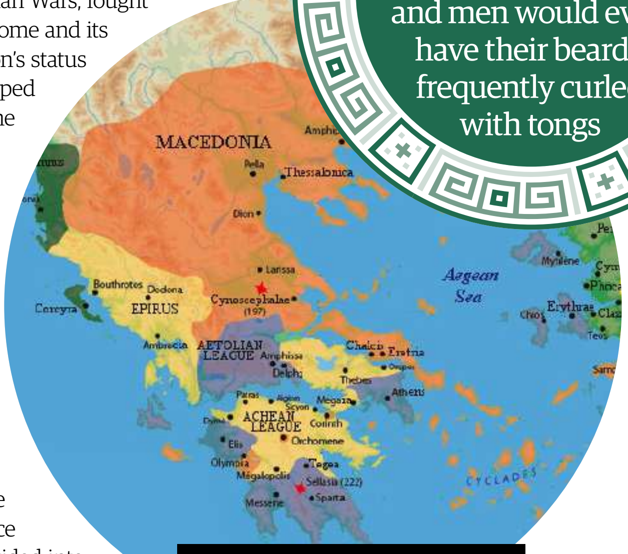
336-323 BCE

Having inherited a well-trained and professional army from his father, a young Alexander turns his insatiable hunger for conquest to the entire known world. Alexander has been fed stories of his divine status, and may believe himself to be a demigod. His charisma and energy gain him many loyal followers, and in a string of victories he conquers Greece, Egypt and the Persian Empire. His army, having marched thousands of kilometres from home, revolts when it reaches India, and he is forced to turn back. After a heavy drinking session that leaves Alexander weak and fever ridden, one of the greatest generals in history passes away aged only 32.

## Rome versus Macedonia

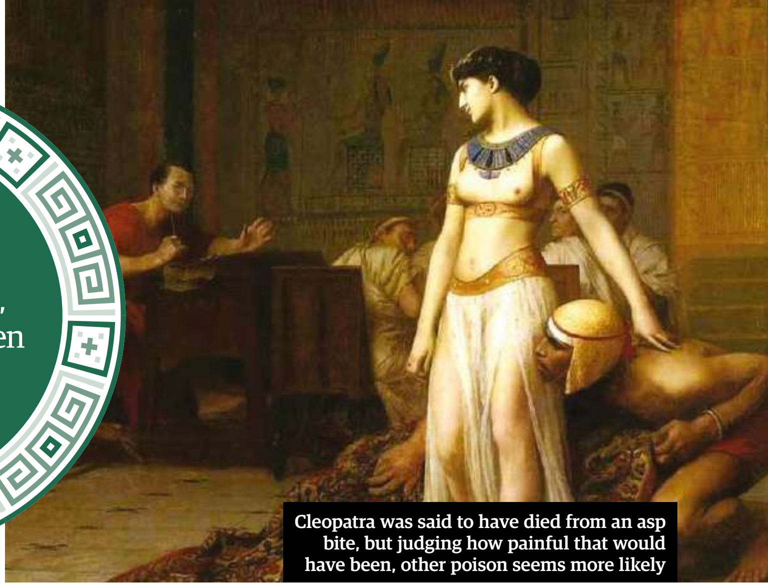
214 BCE

The first of the Macedonian Wars, fought between Macedon and Rome and its Greek allies, sees Macedon's status as a major power be stripped away. It had sided with the Carthaginians during the Second Punic War, so it is a perceived danger to Rome – the threat of it sending reinforcements to General Hannibal Barca sees Rome dispatch troops to bring it to heel. Over a prolonged conflict, the Macedonian phalanx proves no match for the Roman legion, and by the 2nd century BCE, the once great nation has been divided into the new Roman provinces of Achaea and Epirus.



The kingdom of Macedonia, still powerful before the conflict, would be stripped of its power by the Romans

> Beards were a badge or sign of virility in Ancient Greece, and men would even have their beards frequently curled with tongs



Cleopatra was said to have died from an asp bite, but judging how painful that would have been, other poison seems more likely

## Death of a dynasty

30 BCE

When Alexander the Great dies, one of his generals, Ptolemy, installs himself as ruler of Egypt. From him springs the Ptolemaic dynasty that rules the Nile for close to 300 years. While mainland Greece is firmly under the thumb of Rome, Egypt – with its Greek ruling class – still has a measure of independence. This comes to an end with its last queen, Cleopatra, and her doomed love affairs with both Julius Caesar and Mark Antony, two of the most powerful men in the Roman Republic. After instigating civil war against Octavian, the soon-to-be first Roman emperor, Antony and Cleopatra commit suicide, ending the Greek line of pharaohs.

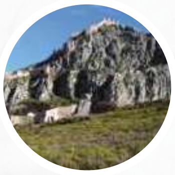
**War of the Diadochi**
Without Alexander's leadership to hold his empire together, the Diadochi – Alexander's generals – fight each other to inherit the kingdom. The first war splits the empire and signals years of conflict and bloodshed between former allies.
**322-320 BCE**

**Gallic invasion**
During the aftermath of the Wars of the Diadochi, the fragile peace is shattered as Gallic tribesmen invade through northern Greece. The Gauls loot the area surrounding Macedon, and gain substantial booty.
**280 BCE**

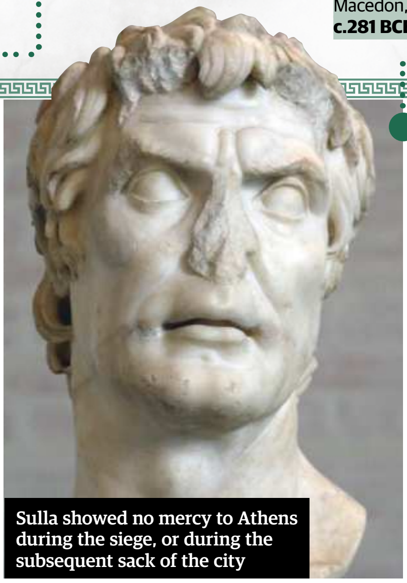
**Defeat at Corinth**
An allied Greek army is crushed under the heel of the Roman legions. With Corinth destroyed, the Roman Republic now has complete control over all of the Greek city-states.
**146 BCE**

336-323 BCE | 322-320 BCE | 281 BCE | 280 BCE | 214 BCE | 146 BCE | 86 BCE | 30 BCE | 381 CE | 1896

**Foundation of the Achaean League**
Also known as the Achaean Confederacy, this group of city-states from the northern and central territories of Greece consider themselves to have a common identity. They come into conflict with Sparta, Macedon, and later Rome itself.
**c.281 BCE**



**The Oracle is silenced**
Having survived numerous sackings, the Oracle at Delphi is closed when the Roman emperor Theodosius I bans all pagan rituals, and instigates Christianity as the state religion of the empire.
**381 CE**



Sulla showed no mercy to Athens during the siege, or during the subsequent sack of the city

## The sacking of Athens

86 BCE

During the First Mithridatic War, fought to stem the Romans' growing influence in the Greek world, a Roman army under the command of General Sulla lays siege to Athens. Stripping the surrounding countryside of wood and valuables, he starves the city, and the sack of Athens is said to have been so great that blood was flowing in the streets. The aftermath leaves no room for ambiguity; it is Rome, not Athens, that is the cultural and political heart of the Mediterranean.

Spyridon Louis was the first winner of the marathon event. Being Greek, this made him a national hero overnight

## Modern Olympic Games

1896

The ancient Olympics are finally revived, but the emphasis changes from the need to win at all costs to one of sportsmanship. A new event is added that was conspicuously absent from the ancient games: the marathon, named after the Battle of Marathon where a runner named Pheidippides had raced over 46 kilometres to bring news of the victory to Athens. This reincarnation also sees Athens become the new seat of the games. Olympia, no longer needed for its religious significance, has been sidelined.

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# EVERYDAY LIFE IN ANCIENT GREECE

From the wealthiest citizens to the poorest slaves, discover what day-to-day life was like in the city-states

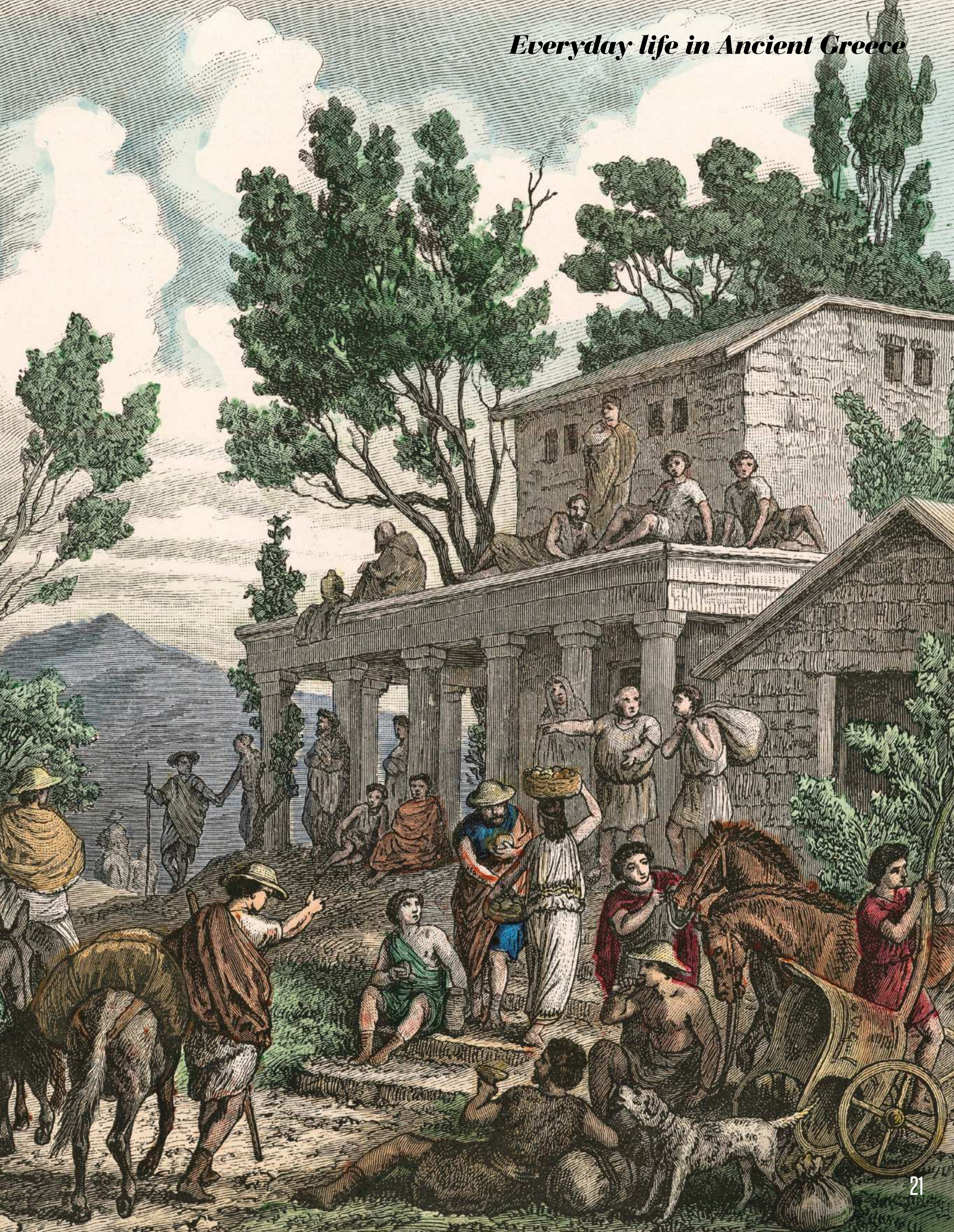
History often concentrates on the feats of great men, and that of Ancient Greece is no different; generations of historians have written countless books about Alexander the Great, Homer and Socrates. But what about the average Greek who lived and died in the city-states without ever leading an army, penning an epic poem or founding a new philosophy? What did they do, where did they live, and what were they taught during this time?

Fragmentary documents, records and archaeological evidence are providing the answers. The musings of philosophers often shed light on everyday activities, while epic poems describe the lives of the characters they feature. Archaeologists have unearthed the foundations of houses and analysed them to work out what happened inside. The objects they have found also provide clues: decorated vases show household scenes, and discarded rubbish tells us about tools used in the workplace. Social historians have pieced it all together to plot the lives of the Ancient Greeks from cradle to grave.

Classical Athens left more sources of information than any other city-state - its population was more literate than any other in the world, and there is an abundance of archaeological remains; so much of what we know about Ancient Greece is based on these. But we also know plenty about the city-state of Sparta - although its population was famously illiterate, generations of historians have found the warlike city-state to be a fascinating study. Elsewhere in Ancient Greece, sources are lacking; for example, our knowledge of everyday life in Macedonia before Alexander the Great is shrouded in the mists of millennia.

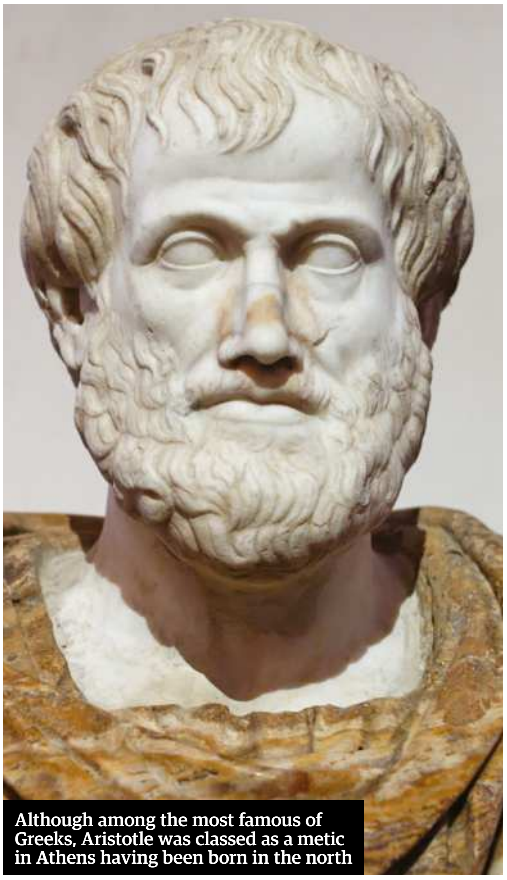
Join us on a journey to the past to find out more about Lycos the slave-ceramicist, Cephalus the shield maker and Pasion the money lender. This is less of a story about great kings and great minds, and more about work, rest and play for the average Greek member of society.

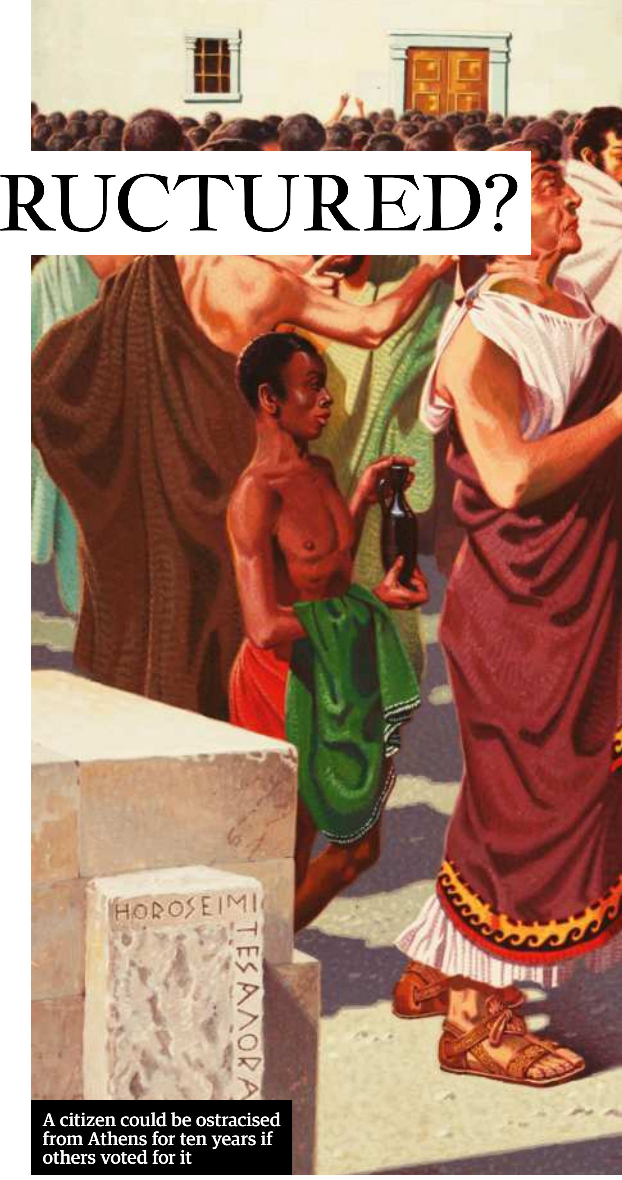
> Although three per cent of Athens' population died in warfare every year, citizens still regarded military service as a privilege



# HOW WAS SOCIETY STRUCTURED?

A gravestone showing a slave attending to her deceased mistress


Although among the most famous of Greeks, Aristotle was classed as a metic in Athens having been born in the north



A citizen could be ostracised from Athens for ten years if others voted for it

The hoplites stood shoulder to shoulder, ready to receive the enemy's charge. In their right hand they carried a spear to kill the enemy, in their left was a shield that locked with its neighbours to create a long wall. Individually, the spearmen were vulnerable. Together, they presented a united and strong front – the much-feared phalanx.

The social structure that defined the city-states can be traced back to the battlefield. In order to function effectively, the phalanx required a large number of soldiers who were committed to maintaining the formation. If each soldier felt they were a part of the city-state for which they fought, they would be more likely to stand strong on the battlefield. Thus the idea of Greek citizenship was born: if every man was bound to fight in the phalanx on the battlefield, they should also be bound to political participation in the city-state.

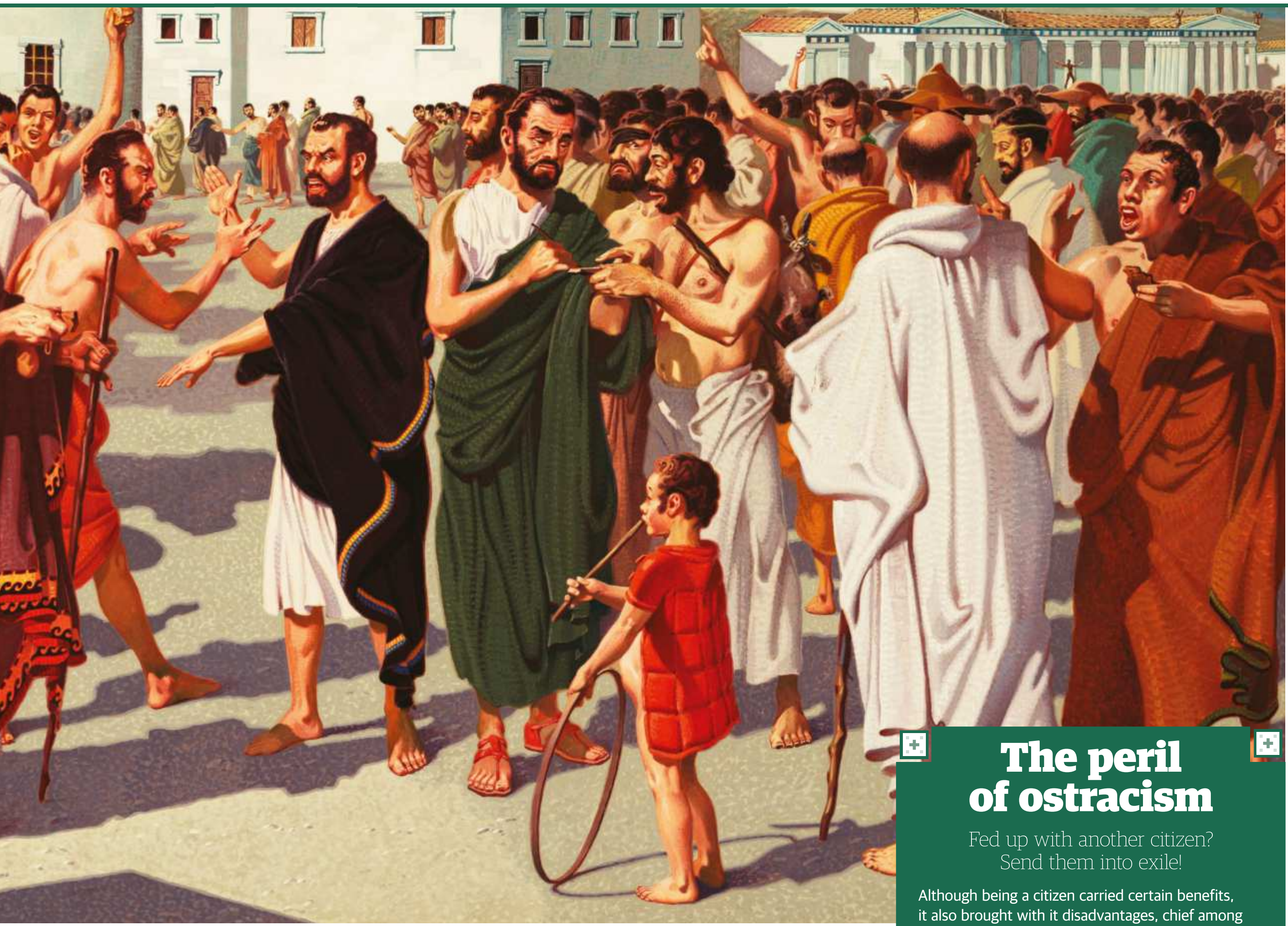
The most demanding duty for a citizen was service in the phalanx when called upon – and considering that most city-states went to war in three out of every four years, they would be called upon often – but they also had civic responsibilities. They had to serve on 501-men juries (so large to prevent any bribery of the jurors) and most would be called to serve on the Council of 500, which was essentially the government. They would receive a moderate payment for their duties, but not much more than a token gesture. Wealthy citizens were expected to pay tax at times of emergency, such as during the Peloponnesian War, and were also subject to liturgies to pay for specified things – perhaps a trireme, a festival or a new gymnasium. These sponsorships were not seen as a burden and different citizens competed to provide the best facilities for the state.

Citizenship was the ideal in Ancient Greece, although it was limited to adult males who had completed their military training. But there were also others who lived in the city-states, with their status varying depending upon their position. Foreign-born residents of Athens, for instance, were known as metics. Although they were liable for military service, they did not have citizenship and were unable to vote, hold office or own land. They did, however, have the right to judicial representation.

Despite the disadvantages of being a metic, Athens received a flood of immigrants following the Persian Wars of the early 5th century BCE as Ionians fled to a place of safety. They were forced to pay a poll tax of one drachma per month or else face enslavement. Numbers continued to grow throughout the next few decades, reaching 20,000 by 431 BCE, which was perhaps ten per cent of the total Athenian population. It was a considerable minority, but they played an important role in city life.

A cache of 190 ostraka dumped in a well, all inscribed with similar handwriting, may be evidence of Athenian electoral fraud

At the bottom of the social hierarchy were the slaves, making up one-quarter of the population of Athens. An inescapable facet of Greek society, the work done by slaves enabled citizens to have the time to take part in the democratic system. Slave-owning was usually small scale as little profit was to be made in the buying and selling of them. An unskilled slave typically cost around 200 drachmae, or 200 times the amount of a worker's



“The spring festival in honour of Dionysus was particularly raucous”

daily wage. Skilled slaves might cost three times the amount, while one particular slave-prostitute exchanged hands for 3,000 drachmae.

Many female slaves were used for domestic service, preparing food and helping around the house. However, this often left them at risk of abuse at the hands of their masters. Male slaves were often set up in their own workshops where they would work at a trade, sometimes lucky enough to earn enough money on the side to buy their freedom – a free slave was given the same rights as a metic.

The status of women was often little better than that of the slave, especially in Athens. Women were excluded from political participation, could not own property in their own right and were usually dependent on their husband, father or male relatives. Most of their lives were spent stuck inside, weaving and playing music. Since shopping was usually done by slaves, the best opportunity women had to leave the house was to collect water - though rich women had slaves for this, too.

Only in terms of religion were Athenian women provided with opportunities for independence. The patron goddess of the city, Athena, was served by female priestesses, while other gods also had priestesses at the centre of their worship. Only women celebrated the festival of Thesmophoria, honouring Demeter and the successful harvest. The spring festival in honour of Dionysus, the god of wine, was particularly raucous. Women would leave the city and drink copious quantities of wine, and men were advised to give the celebrants a wide berth.

## The peril of ostracism

Fed up with another citizen? Send them into exile!

Although being a citizen carried certain benefits, it also brought with it disadvantages, chief among which was the threat of ostracism. Once a year, Athenians citizens were asked if they wanted to ostracise one of their number. If the answer was yes, a vote was held during which each citizen placed the name of another on a piece of pottery named an ostraka, from which the process of ostracism got its name. The nominations were tallied and the person with the most votes – as long as a minimum number or quorum was reached – was exiled from Athens. The ostracised citizen had ten days to leave the city and would be executed if they returned, although their property and possessions were protected and they were free to return after ten years had passed.

Ostracism was designed to neutralise a threat to the city-state and prevent individual citizens from becoming so powerful that they became a tyrant. However, the system was open to abuse. Some ostracised citizens were victims of personal grudges. On one occasion, statesman and general Aristides the Just offered to help an illiterate citizen inscribe his ostraka. Not recognising his helper, the citizen asked Aristides to write his own name: “It’s simply that I’m tired of hearing how good he is.” Aristides went on to amass the most votes and was ostracised, but was recalled to help fight the Persian invasion of 479 BCE.

# WHAT WAS DOMESTIC LIFE LIKE?

Early Greek houses tended to be simple two-room dwellings with an open porch and a low-pitched pediment, a style that manifested itself in later classical temple architecture. However, domestic home design soon moved on to courtyard residences that housed extended families. Husband and wife, children, grandparents, unmarried siblings and household slaves all lived under one roof, although slave quarters would have been kept very separate from the family and may sometimes have been in a different building.

Girls tended to spend their lives isolated in the home. They would be betrothed early, often around the age of five, and would marry when they came of age around 16 – her groom would be around 30. The wedding festivities lasted three days, and sacrifices would be made to Artemis, the goddess of virginity, and Hera, the goddess of marriage. The bride would dispose of her childhood toys before being ritually bathed and dressed. The groom would arrive at the bride's house having been similarly prepared and, after a banquet, would return to his own home with his new bride and the dowry her father provided.

However, the wife would have little more freedom in her new home than she would have done as a child. Women spent much of their lives in the confines of the home with only domestic chores to do. This included weaving, which remained a household task rather than becoming a trade. The women of the household were largely restricted to the gynaikon, rooms on the upper floor, including at night – husbands and wives usually slept separately.

Men also had their own rooms in the house, called the andron. Here, they would relax during the day – assuming that they were not working or attending civic duties – and entertain at night. There was little organised recreation in the city-states, so Greeks would invite guests to a party called a symposium (meaning 'drinking together'). This was a ritualised institution that began with the serving of dinner. After the food was cleared away, garlands of flowers would be worn and drinks – wine only, as the Greeks did not drink beer – would be distributed. Libations would be taken to honour various gods and strict rules were in place to ensure that things did not get out of hand, although there is plenty of evidence that many symposia ended in quarrels or drunken orgies. Although women were banned, female flute players and dancers were often employed as entertainment, while slave girls would be used to serve the wine.

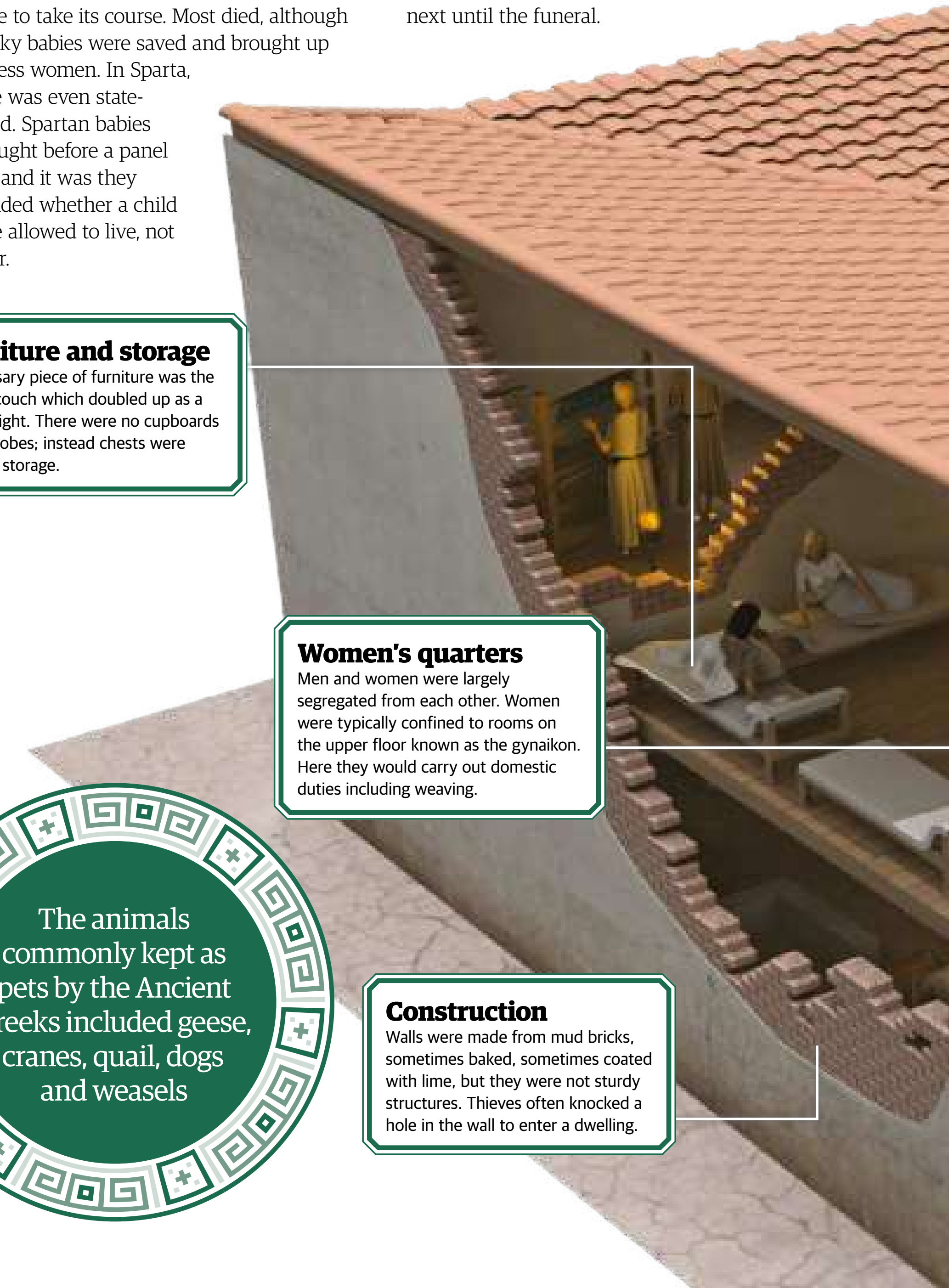
Separate male and female living quarters were a luxury that the poorest citizens could not afford, so they made do wth one-room abodes that were partitioned using temporary moveable walls. They did not have the space to host a symposium so would leave the house to drink in the city's bars, which ranged from simple street stalls to multi-room buildings that served food and wine and offered torches so patrons could make their way home along the city's unlit streets.

Although most men and women kept to separate quarters by day and night, Ancient Greece managed to maintain a high birth rate, and once a wife provided her husband with a male heir, her status would rise. However, unwanted pregnancies and children were common. To deal with the problem, Greeks used a drastic measure: infanticide.

Although the physical killing of a child was classed as murder and was punishable by the state, it was perfectly acceptable for a father to reject an unwanted child either because it was deemed sickly or unfit, or merely because it was a girl. In these cases, the baby was left outside the city for nature to take its course. Most died, although some lucky babies were saved and brought up by childless women. In Sparta, exposure was even state-sponsored. Spartan babies were brought before a panel of elders and it was they who decided whether a child would be allowed to live, not the father.

The lucky Greek child who was rescued or deemed fit to live spent their first years in the female rooms of the house. Rich families would employ a wet nurse, while poorer mothers would take on childcare themselves, but nearly all children would be read the stories from Aesop's *Fables*. At the age of six, the next stage in their education would begin.

Where there is birth, there is also death. If a family member died, responsibility for preparing the body fell to those remaining in the house and the deceased's corpse would remain in the home for up to three days. Demonstrations of grief were public, with much tearing of clothes and hair, loud crying and refusal to eat – behaviours that were thought to comfort the dead, who would temporarily reside between this world and the next until the funeral.



**Furniture and storage**
A necessary piece of furniture was the kline, a couch which doubled up as a bed at night. There were no cupboards or wardrobes; instead chests were used for storage.

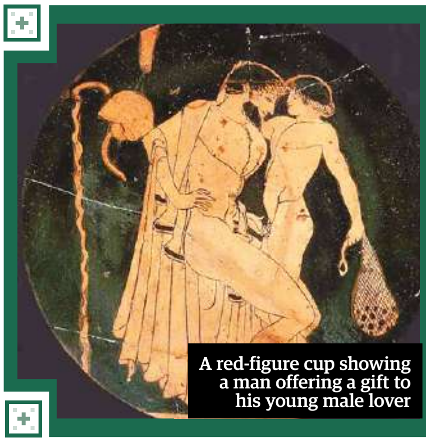
**Women's quarters**
Men and women were largely segregated from each other. Women were typically confined to rooms on the upper floor known as the gynaikon. Here they would carry out domestic duties including weaving.

**Construction**
Walls were made from mud bricks, sometimes baked, sometimes coated with lime, but they were not sturdy structures. Thieves often knocked a hole in the wall to enter a dwelling.

The animals commonly kept as pets by the Ancient Greeks included geese, cranes, quail, dogs and weasels

## Pillow talk

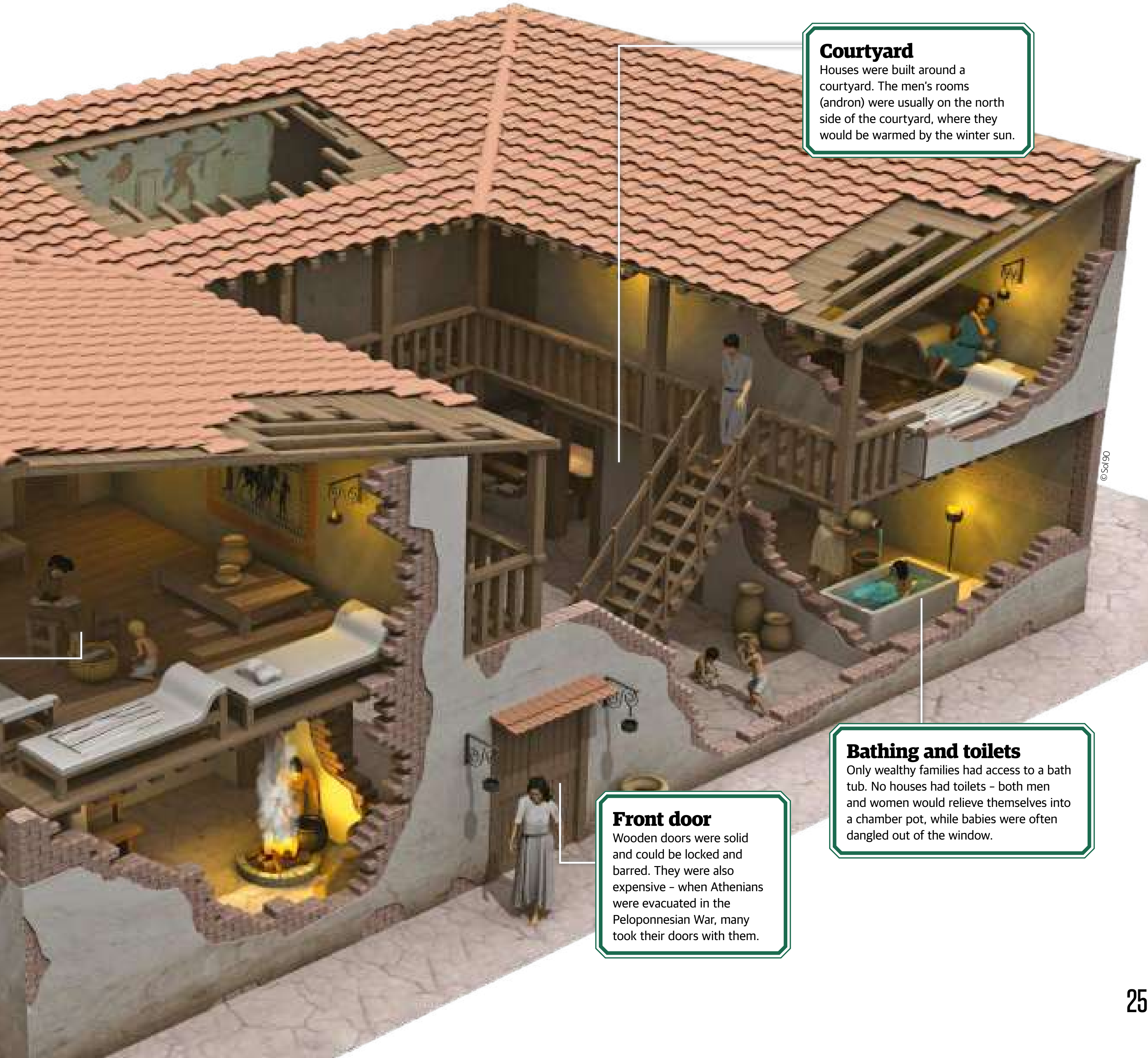
### Jump in bed with the Ancient Greeks to discover the truth behind prostitution and pederasty


A red-figure cup showing a man offering a gift to his young male lover

According to the playwright Aristophanes, humans originally had four arms, four legs and two sets of genitals: either two male, two female or one of each. But Zeus split everyone in two, forcing them to look for their other half, and their sexual orientation was determined by the genitals of the half they searched for. While it sounds like it could show the Ancient Greeks being accepting of homosexuality, in reality, it wasn't necessarily a concept that existsted.

Having said that, many Greek men did have relationships with boys between the ages of 12 and 15, often beginning with a ritualised kidnapping with the permission of the boy's father. However, when the boy reached adulthood, the relationship would usually end. Although pederasty, as the practice was called, was considered entirely acceptable, sex between adult males was seen as absurd.

Heterosexuality was the norm. Weddings were normally arranged between men and women, and the family units they created were the core building blocks of the city-state. Although marriages were supposed to be monogamous, both married and unmarried men made use of prostitutes. Grand hetaerae charged hundreds of drachmae and often became the lovers of great men, while lower down the social scale, Kerameikos was the red-light district where Athens' streetwalkers plied their trade.



**Courtyard**
Houses were built around a courtyard. The men's rooms (andron) were usually on the north side of the courtyard, where they would be warmed by the winter sun.

**Bathing and toilets**
Only wealthy families had access to a bath tub. No houses had toilets – both men and women would relieve themselves into a chamber pot, while babies were often dangled out of the window.

**Front door**
Wooden doors were solid and could be locked and barred. They were also expensive – when Athenians were evacuated in the Peloponnesian War, many took their doors with them.

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18+

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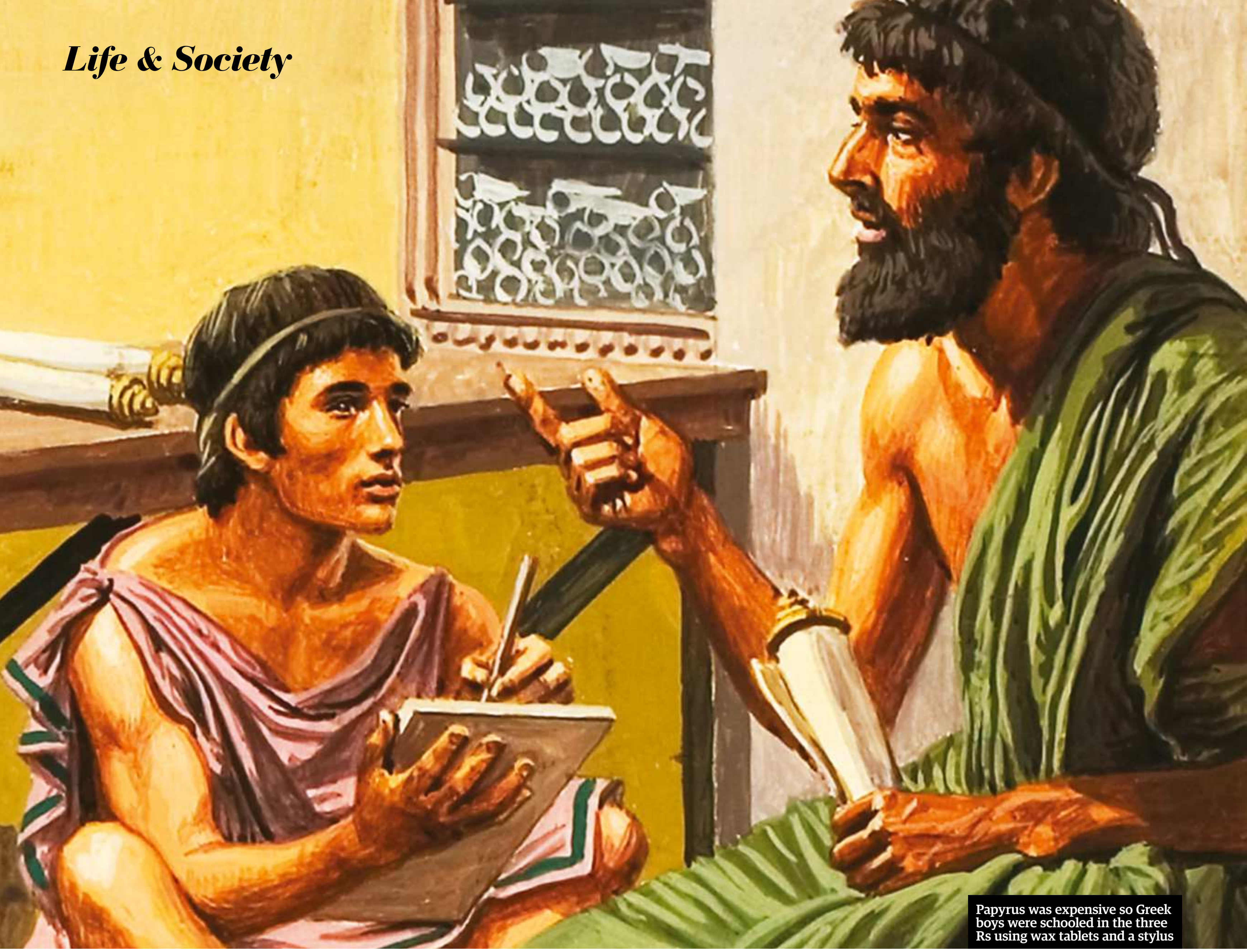


Papyrus was expensive so Greek boys were schooled in the three Rs using wax tablets and a stylus

# HOW WERE CHILDREN TAUGHT?

Aristotle, one of the greatest Greek minds, declared that “the roots of education are bitter, but the fruit is sweet”. Most Greek city-states regarded education as an important tool to help their people become effective citizens of the future, but the states actually played a minor role in teaching the young, leaving education in the hands of parents and private teachers. Only at the age of 18 did the city-state step in and demand that boys, now classed as ephebe, undergo two years of military service.

Early education occurred in an informal setting, usually at home, where a child was taught by their mother or a slave. From the age of six, most boys attended three different types of classes, paying for the privilege, although fees were often low enough that all but the poorest families could send their children for at least a few years. Lessons were usually held in the house of the tutor with ten or 20 boys in attendence. Boys from the wealthiest families were often accompanied by a paidagogos, a household slave who escorted them to school and took care of them during the day, but it was illegal for any adult other than the slave or teacher to enter the children's classroom.

The first type of teacher, a grammatistes, would instruct boys in the three Rs. There were no desks, with students instead sitting on stools and writing on wax tablets with a stylus made from bone or metal. When they were ready to deal with longer works, boys were expected to learn the poems of Homer and be able to recite long passages. In the second type of class, a kitharistes (lyre player) would teach mousike, a combination of music, dance, lyrics and poetry. Most boys would learn to play musical instruments, usually the lyre, flute and pipes.

No more than 30 per cent of the Greek population was literate, although some slaves were trained to read and write

However, the most important school was the gymnasium, supervised by paidotribes (physical trainers), where students were instructed in sports such as wrestling, running, discus and javelin. Physical training was seen as necessary for good health, to improve one's appearance and, most importantly, to prepare boys for the citizen-army. As a result, the paidotribes were the most highly paid of all teachers.

Education ended when boys reached adolescence and began to learn a trade. However, those from wealthier families would continue their paid education under sophists, itinerant philosopher-teachers who would travel from town to town teaching rhetoric. For young Greeks with political ambitions, rhetoric was a key skill. Being able to

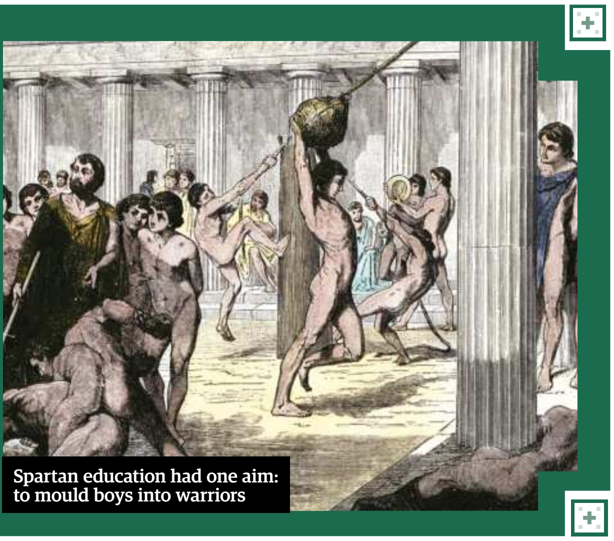
## This is Sparta

How did Greece's militaristic city-state train a new generation of warriors?

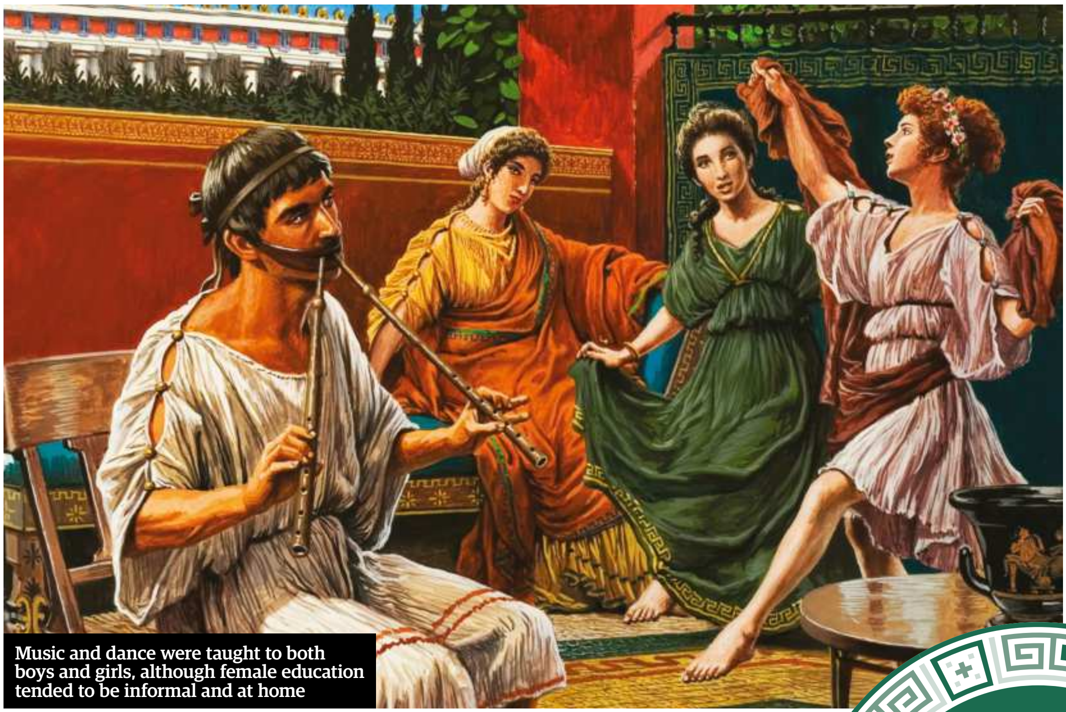
Although most Ancient Greek city-states aimed to prepare boys to become effective citizens, Sparta had a more singular objective: to train boys to take their place in the phalanx. In order to do this, education was controlled by the state. Boys entered the agoge – a military school – when they were about seven years old, and for the next 12 years they slept in the barracks with their classmates and were instructed by veteran soldiers in a brutal environment.

Boys were purposely given little food and clothing to encourage them to forage, steal and endure hunger. Punishments gradually became harsher and physical training became harder in order to build up strength and stamina. Although reading and writing were taught, they weren't considered important skills beyond being able to understand military messages. Music and dancing also formed part of the curriculum, but even they had a military use, aiding the boys' ability to move en masse in the phalanx.

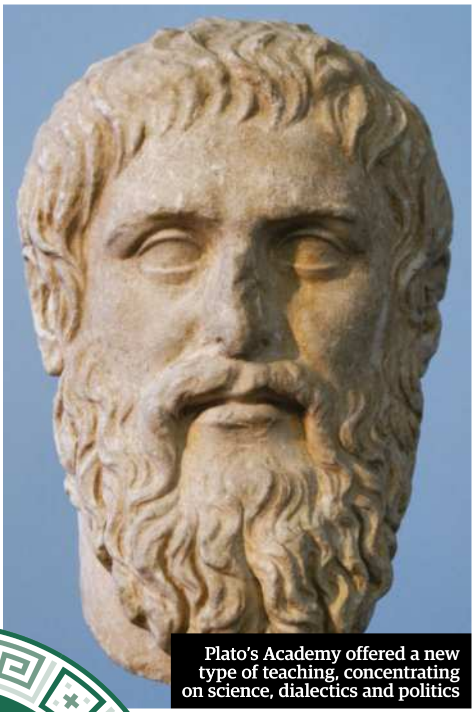
The culmination of the agoge came when the best students were instructed to hunt down and kill a slave. If caught, the boy would be disciplined – not for murder, but for his inability to commit the killing without being discovered. After the agoge, another exhaustive two years of military training would follow. Only then would a 20-year-old Spartan be considered a warrior ready to take his place on the battlefield.



Spartan education had one aim: to mould boys into warriors



Music and dance were taught to both boys and girls, although female education tended to be informal and at home



Plato's Academy offered a new type of teaching, concentrating on science, dialectics and politics

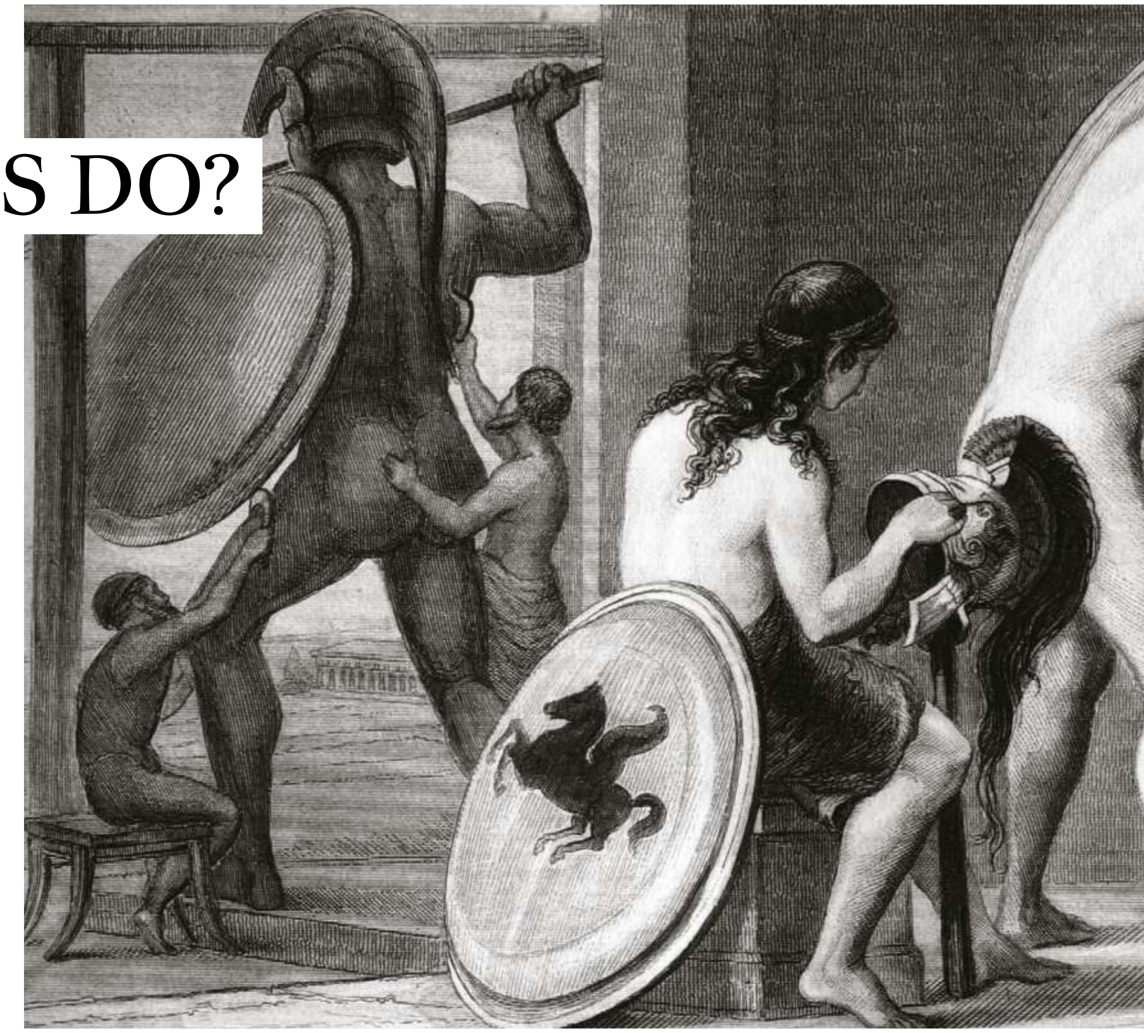
speak well, to sway the assembly or law courts, was the path to power.

Isocrates opened up a permanent school of rhetoric in Athens around 392 BCE and his unusually high fees allowed him to amass a considerable fortune. However, not all Athenians were convinced of the value in his lessons, and some blamed their problems on an overemphasis on rhetoric in education. As a democratic city, important decisions were made by votes of all Athenian male citizens meeting in an assembly. After a series of questionable decisions, Athens was conquered by Sparta and many citizens blamed their fall on education: not because they didn't understand what they were voting on, but because teaching rhetoric allowed some people to persuade the assembly to make poor decisions.

With the growth of philosophy in Greece, the idea of education as a lifelong passion began to emerge. Sometime after 387 BCE, when Plato is thought to have returned from his first visit to Italy and Sicily, he opened the Academy in Athens – often thought of as the first university. Essentially a club for interested and interesting minds, the Academy did not charge a fee for lessons, but it wasn't open to the public. There was no formal curriculum or distinction between teachers and students, but members studied mathematics, science, dialectics and politics – unlike Isocrates, Plato placed little value on rhetoric. Among the Academy's pupils was the infamous Aristotle, who studied there for 20 years before tutoring Alexander the Great and founding his own school, the Lyceum.

> The Library of Alexandria is said to have contained over half a million papyrus rolls – double that of any other library

Although formal education was limited to boys across most of Ancient Greece, wealthier girls did have the advantage of being taught at home – often by a slave – and instructed how to read, write and play the lyre. Only in Sparta were they given a formal education. As well as being taught how to sing, dance and play music, Spartan women were instructed in physical education and even taught to run, wrestle and throw. The idea during this time was that strong women would produce strong children, and that Spartan women could be used as a last-resort defence force.



# WHAT JOBS DID GREEKS DO?

For most Ancient Greek men, the ideal way to spend life was as a gentleman of leisure. Released from the need to work to live, such a gentleman could dedicate himself to the political and social obligations placed upon them by the city-state. If a citizen was to play his role in direct democracy to full effect, he should be well informed and able to take part in the discussions and debates that moulded policy.

Yet the vast majority of Greeks were not so lucky that they could spend their days gossiping in the agora. More than half of Attica's population worked in the countryside - although many lived inside the city walls for security - tending small plots of land that they either owned themselves or rented from richer landlords in return for a percentage of the yield. Barley and wheat were the staple crops, supplemented by the likes of olives, cabbages, onions and lettuce.

For those who worked within the city walls, the majority were tradesmen who saw to the day-to-day needs of the population: blacksmiths, sculptors, painters, carpenters and so on. Many were citizens, although undoubtedly of a lower social class than the gentry, but others were foreign-born metics or slaves who were engaged in a trade on behalf of their owner. These slaves had a degree of independence in their lives compared to those who worked in the house as domestic servants, but any money they made would belong to their owner - although some were allowed to keep a small share. Among the slave artisans who are known to have worked in Athens was Lydos, who stamped 'Lydos the slave' on any vases he produced.

Some tradesmen could gain extraordinary wealth through their skilled hands. When Demosthenes the knife maker died, he left behind an estate equivalent to 220 times the annual salary of a labourer. When Cephalus of Syracuse set up a shield-making workshop in Piraeus, his business grew to the extent that he had 120 slaves working under him. However, success on such a scale was rare and Demosthenes and Cephalus were exceptions.

It wasn't just slaves who were employed by the more successful tradesmen - poorer citizens would be given jobs in workshops too, although being in the employ of other Greeks was considered an embarrassment. It was a status perhaps even lower than that of a slave, because at least a slave had a degree of job security.

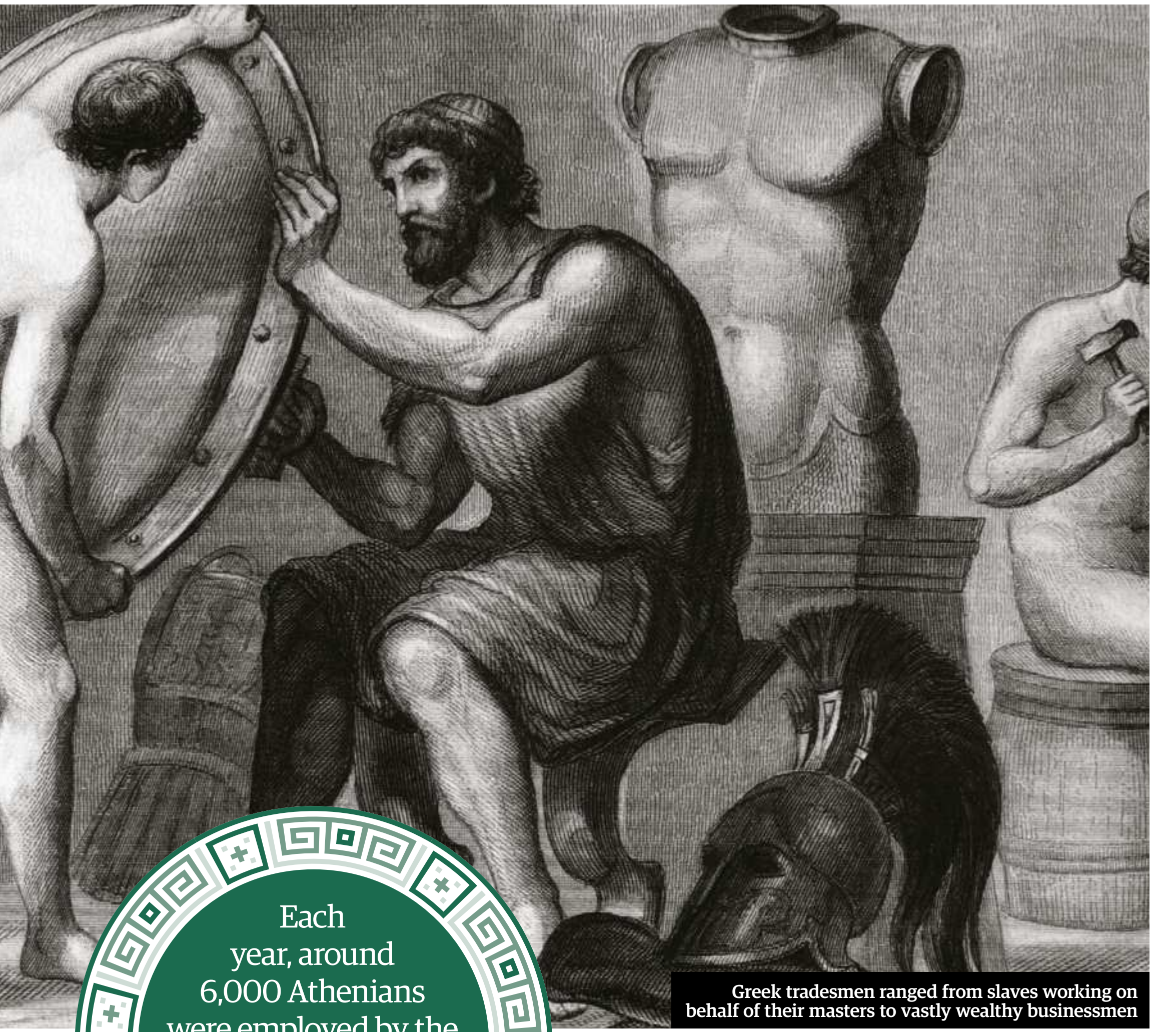
As trade routes developed, connecting Greeks to each other and the wider world, including Persia, India, Britain and China, city-states began to specialise in certain trades. Corinth was known for its ceramicists who crafted the pottery amphorae that carried olive oil and wine across Greece and the known world, although its ceramicists were later displaced by those from Athens. Corinth later found a new speciality in metalwork, while the best textiles came from Miletus and the best parchment from the city of Kerameikos.

One result of increased trade and prosperity was the growth of a new industry: banking and money lending. Merchants who could not afford large outlays of money would borrow using letters of credit, repaying what they owed on the completion of their voyages. It led to the development of a complicated financial system that required some Ionian city-states to employ financial advisers to keep track of the flow of money. It also provided a rare opportunity for advancement. In Athens, a slave called Pasion showed such wit when running a money-lending table that he was rewarded with his freedom. He inherited his old owners' banking business, established a shield factory and gifted 1,000 shields and a trireme to the state, for which he was rewarded with Athenian citizenship - a spectacular rise for a former slave.

Few shops have been discovered by archaeologists - instead tradesmen would sell their own wares on market days

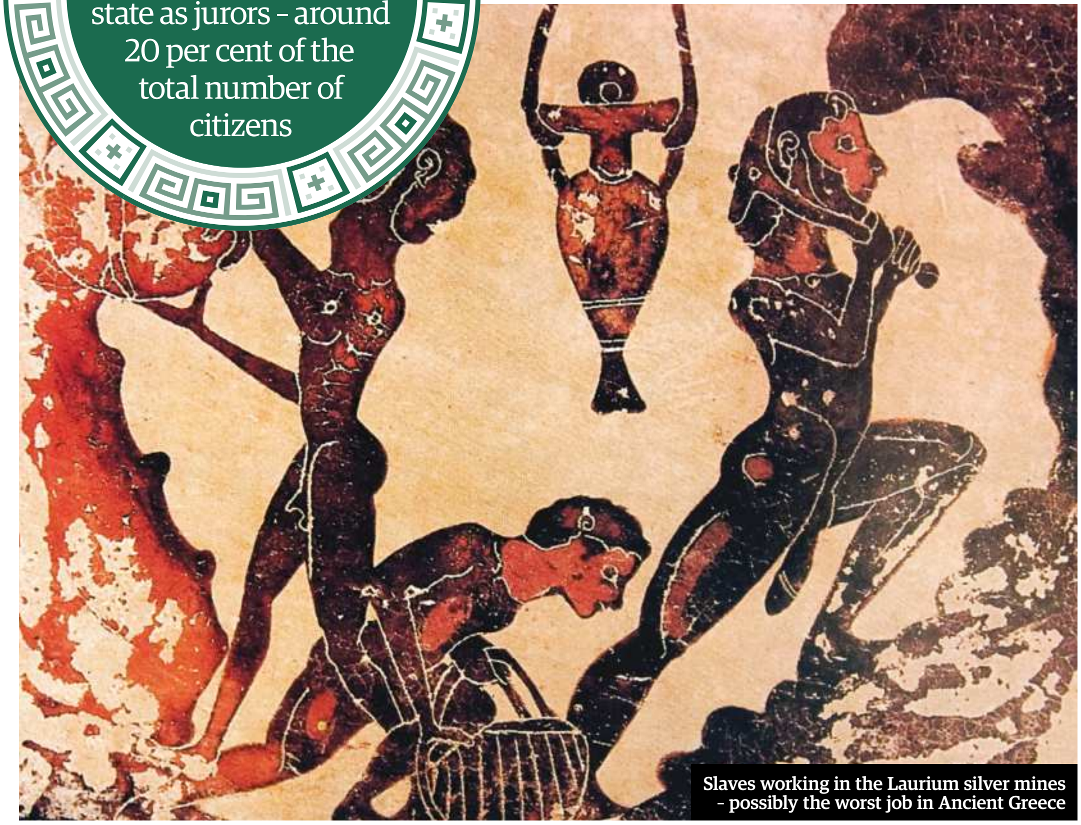
Another offshoot from Athenian prosperity was an element of social security, one which allowed poor citizens to be employed as rowers in the navy and the elderly to serve as jurors. Tradesmen were employed to build grand civic buildings like the Parthenon. Those working for the state were paid one drachma per day, no matter what the work, and were expected to toil from dawn to late afternoon regardless of the season.

The one place where no Greek ever wanted to end up working was the mines. So horrific were the conditions there that slavery was almost ubiquitous - few free men would ever stoop so low. The silver mines at Laurium and gold mines at Mount Pangaeus claimed many lives, including those of young slave children who were tasked with crawling through the smallest tunnels, often 100 metres underground.



Greek tradesmen ranged from slaves working on behalf of their masters to vastly wealthy businessmen

Each year, around 6,000 Athenians were employed by the state as jurors – around 20 per cent of the total number of citizens



Slaves working in the Laurium silver mines - possibly the worst job in Ancient Greece

# Slavery to success

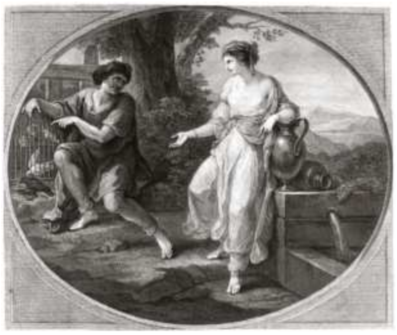
Not all slaves were condemned to a life of drudgery - these men escaped the shackles and made their life a success

## Aesop

Aesop was born into slavery and, although described as strikingly ugly, used his great mind to win his freedom and become an adviser to kings. He also wrote the *Fables*, a collection of folk tales with which every Greek child was familiar.

## Rhodopis

Known by a nickname that means rosy-cheeked, Rhodopis was a slave-prostitute who was taken to Egypt by her owner and bought her freedom by a client who had fallen for her beauty. She continued to work as a prostitute in Egypt, and stories even suggest that the pharaoh made her his queen.



## Diogenes the Cynic

One of the founders of cynicism, the philosopher Diogenes found himself cast into slavery after being captured by pirates and sold to a Corinthian who wanted Diogenes to tutor his children. He remained in Corinth until his death, by which time he had been freed by his master.

## Phaedo of Elis

Taken prisoner by the Spartans in 402 BCE, Phaedo's beauty led to him becoming a slave-prostitute until he was bought his freedom by a friend of Socrates. Phaedo then became attached to the great philosopher and was present at his death, before returning to Elis and founding his own school.

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# THE ANCIENT OLYMPICS

Explore the origins of the Olympics, from the festival, athletes and events to the mythology

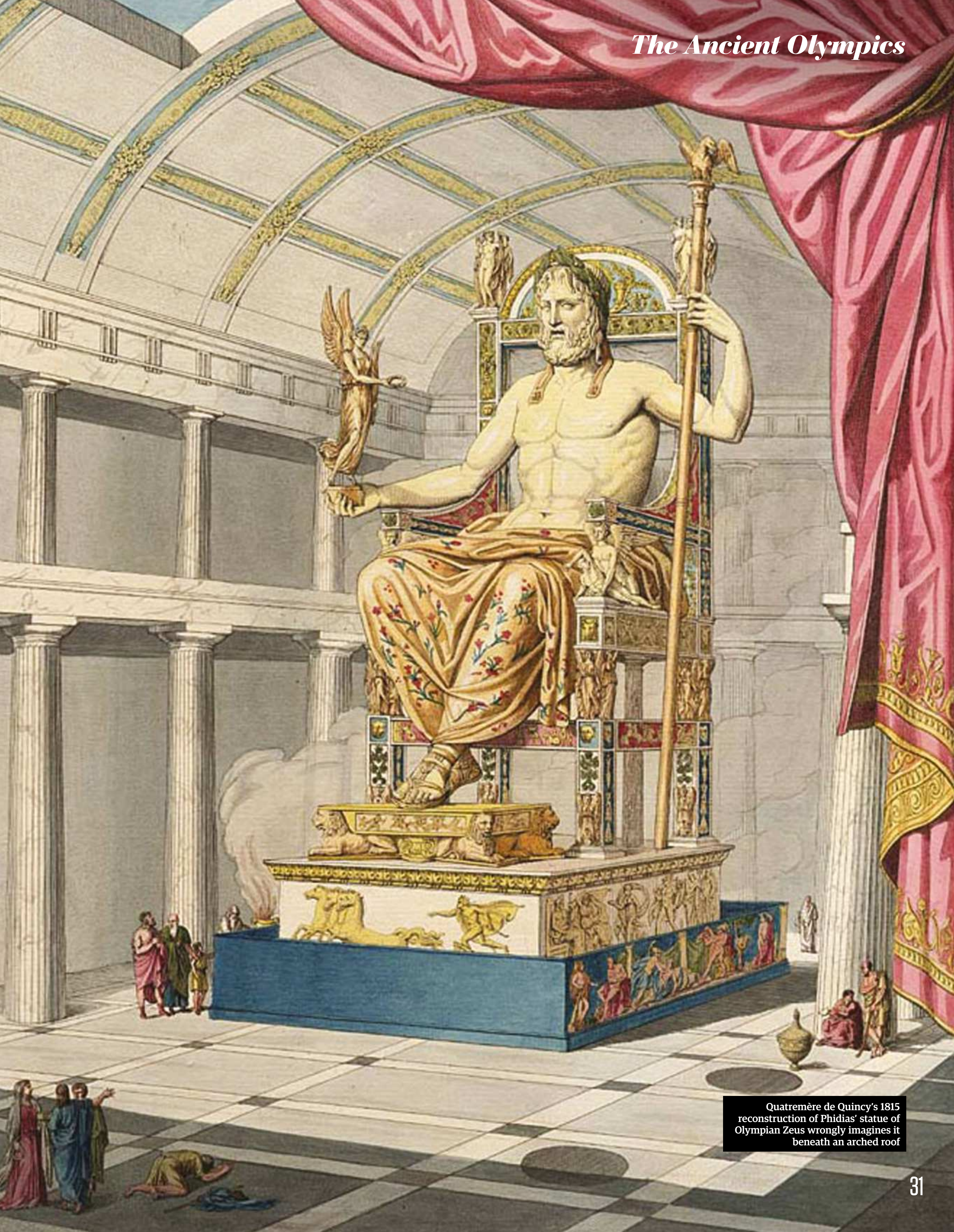
Every four years from 776 BCE to around 425 CE, competitors and spectators flocked to a sanctuary in southern Greece to participate in one of the most extraordinary events of the ancient world. It was a festival in honour of Zeus, king of the gods, who ruled from the snow-capped peaks of Mount Olympus far to the north. Indeed, it was from Olympian Zeus that the location of the sanctuary was named: Olympia.

The festival had humble origins. In its early years, participants came mainly from Elis, the city just under 65 kilometres away that controlled the sanctuary. On the morning following the August full moon, they sang hymns, chanted prayers, and sacrificed oxen to Zeus, burning the bones and fat on the altar as an offering before cooking the meat for that evening's banquet. As the mouth-watering aromas filled the air, many of those present made their way a little to the east, stripped down to their loincloths – only from 720 BCE were competitors naked – and, while the rest looked on, raced back to the finishing line near the altar. The distance, around 180 metres, was called in Greek a 'stade', the origin of our word 'stadium'. In 30 seconds the race was over, and in 776 BCE the winner was proclaimed. He was a local baker called Coroebus, that year's only victor, for the foot race was the only contest. The Olympic Games began as one Olympic game.

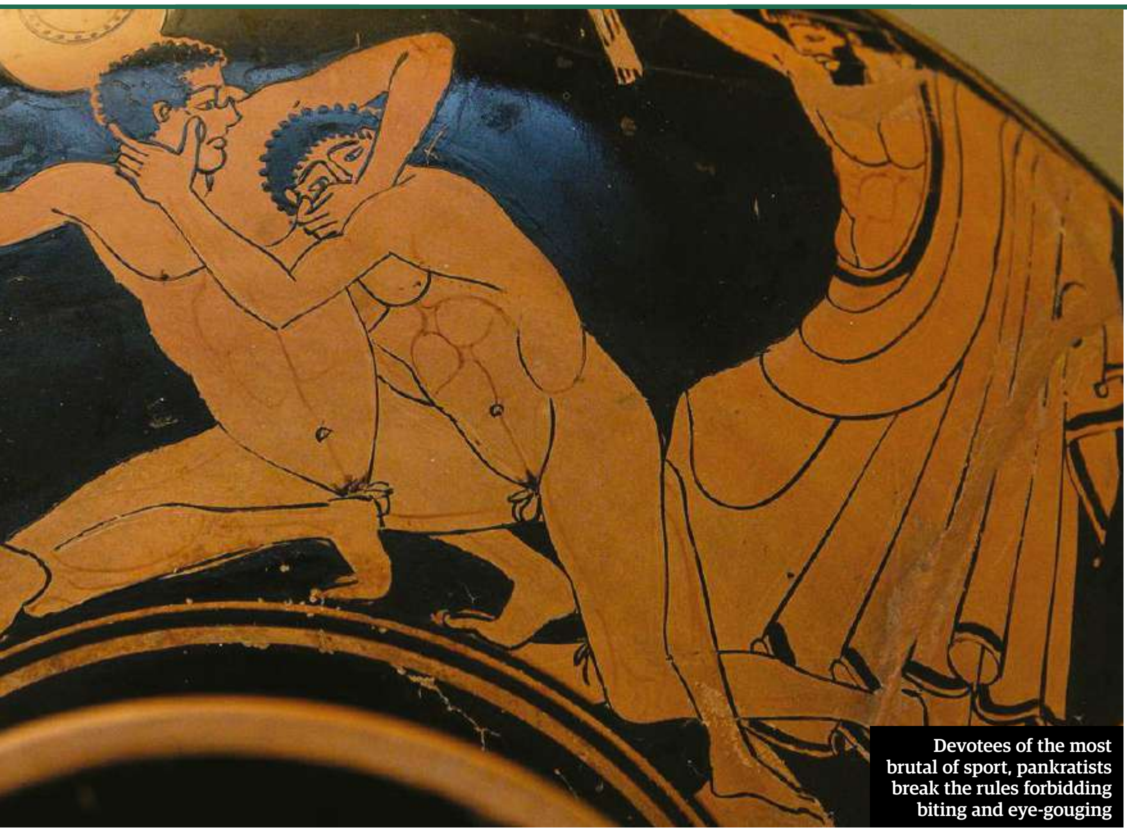
So it remained for two generations, but from 724 BCE other events were introduced, and the reputation of the festival began to spread. Coincidentally, this was a time of new beginnings for the Greeks, as many mainland cities sent shiploads of citizens to plant new settlements in foreign lands from Marseilles in the west to Byzantium in the east, and from Cyrene in Libya to Epidamnus in modern Albania. As the Greek footprint expanded, Greeks felt a growing need to maintain, or create, a cultural identity. The 5th century BCE historian Herodotus writes that what united them was "kinship in blood and speech, the shrines of gods, the sacrifices that we have in common, and the similarity of our lifestyle". He might have added 'competitiveness', because inspiring almost every Greek was the advice given to Achilles in the *Iliad*, a poem like the Olympics with its roots in the 8th century BCE: "Always to be best and to surpass all others".

As the *Iliad*, with its tales of bravery culminating in funeral games for Patroclus, was fuelling the Greeks' imaginations, the setting where they could locate themselves as the true heirs of the heroes of the Trojan War was fast becoming recognised as Olympia and, although other sports-related festivals sprang up – notably at Delphi, Corinth and Nemea – the Olympics reigned supreme. By the 6th century BCE, competitors were arriving from all over the Greek world and, when in the early 5th century mainland Greeks successfully fought off the Persian invasions while Sicilian Greeks defeated the Carthaginians and Etruscans, it was at Olympia that they made offerings of thanks.

As the festival's status grew, the Games expanded to cover five days. At the same time, new opportunities to display power through sacrifice and banquets meant that Olympia was



Quatremère de Quincy's 1815 reconstruction of Phidias' statue of Olympian Zeus wrongly imagines it beneath an arched roof


Devotees of the most brutal of sport, pankratists break the rules forbidding biting and eye-gouging

> "Olympia was now attracting not just athletes but the rich and influential"

now attracting not just athletes but the rich and influential, as well as kings and politicians eager to strut the international stage, hold high-level conferences and negotiate high-profile deals. Many were keen to compete in the chariot race, the Games' most expensive event. Among them was Alexander I, King of Macedon, whose people many considered not to be pure Greeks. In 504 BCE, he successfully proved his eligibility by tracing his ancestors back to the Peloponnesian city of Argos. Almost a century later in 416 BCE, the Athenian playboy politician Alcibiades too used the Olympic chariot race to proclaim his wealth and power by entering an unrivalled seven teams. Unsurprisingly he won, and to celebrate he entertained the spectators to a banquet, paid for in part by his wealthy backers from the Aegean islands of Chios and Lesbos.

Meanwhile, as the numbers of attendees swelled, others were attracted, too: not just merchants hoping to make valuable sales, but writers such as Herodotus, who read his *Histories* from the portico of Zeus' temple; artists such as Zeuxis, the inventor of trompe l'oeil, who wafted round Olympia in a cloak advertising his name in golden letters; and poets like the praise-singer Pindar, eager to win commissions from victorious athletes. Although the far-seeing orator Isocrates used the panhellenic gathering to make heartfelt pleas for Greek unity in the face of strong aggressors, they fell on deaf ears. At the battle of Chaeronea in 338 BCE, Philip II of Macedon defeated the mainland Greek states and marked his victory by erecting his 'Philippeion' - a round temple containing statues of himself and his family - at Olympia next to the Temple of Hera, wife of Zeus.

Under the Roman Empire the Olympics continued to thrive, though occasionally an emperor might bend the rules. In 67 CE, Nero not only rescheduled the Games to allow him to take part, he also tried to show his prowess by driving his own ten-horse chariot. But nothing went to plan. His biographer Suetonius records: "He fell from his chariot and was helped back in, but he could not continue and gave up before the end. Even so he won the victor's crown."

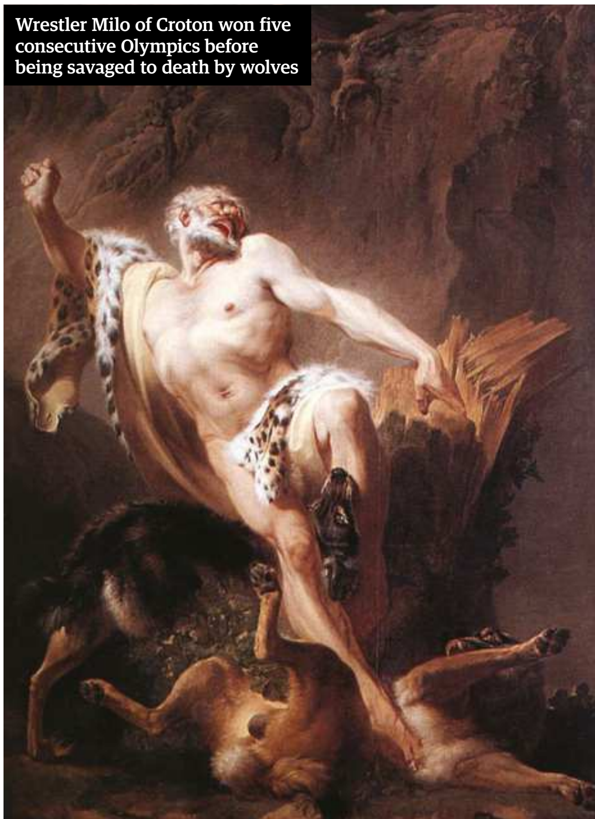
At last Christianity put paid to the Olympic Festival. After all, it was in honour of a pagan god. Outlawed in 391 CE by the Christian Emperor Theodosius, the Olympics struggled on for another 30 years, however, by 425 CE the Games were no more.

## MYTHOLOGY

All classical accounts of the Olympics' origins involved mythology. Some maintained that it was at Olympia that Zeus defeated his father Cronus and assumed control of gods and mortals. Others claimed that Heracles established the first Games to celebrate his victory over the local King Augeas, who had refused to pay the hero for one of his 12 labours, cleansing the royal stables.

Still others disagreed. For them, the founder of the Games was Pelops, an Ionian prince from Phocaea (modern Foça in Turkey). Learning that the wealthy Greek King Oenomaeus was offering his daughter, Hippodamia, in marriage to whomever beat him in a chariot race, Pelops was determined to win. Even though he possessed a team of magical horses, a gift from the god Poseidon, he took no chances. He bribed the chariot technician, Myrtilus, to remove the lynch pins from Oenomaeus' wheels and substitute them with wax replicas. As the wheels rotated ever faster, the friction made these lynch pins melt; the chariot collapsed and Oenomaeus was dragged to an excruciating death. However, instead of honouring his side of the agreement (to let Myrtilus sleep with Hippodamia), Pelops threw him off a cliff. But Myrtilus' ghost haunted Pelops, and the only way he could appease it was by performing funeral games - the first Olympic Games.

The influence of all three foundation myths were felt at Olympia. Dominating the Altis was a magnificent Temple of Zeus, within whose incense-laden inner chamber was a stunning statue of the seated god wearing the olive crown, awarded to victorious athletes. Created in a specially built onsite workshop by the Athenian sculptor Phidias, it was 12 metres high and faced in gold and ivory, the only one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World located on Greek soil. Such was its numinous beauty that even the 2nd-century Stoic philosopher Epictetus enthused that "people would consider it a great misfortune to die without ever seeing it". Transported to Constantinople by rapacious Romans, the statue was destroyed by fire in 462, but we can still appreciate its power: Byzantine iconographers used it as their model for the face of God.


Wrestler Milo of Croton won five consecutive Olympics before being savaged to death by wolves

Meanwhile, a stone's throw from Zeus' temple to the north, Pelops' grave mound was the site of one of the festival's most solemn ceremonies, when a black ram was sacrificed to the dead hero, while Heracles, said to be the first to make this sacrifice, was praised for something altogether more prosaic. Legend told that thanks to his sacrifice to the very specifically named Zeus 'who banishes flies', Zeus Apomuios, he caused Olympia to be fly-free.

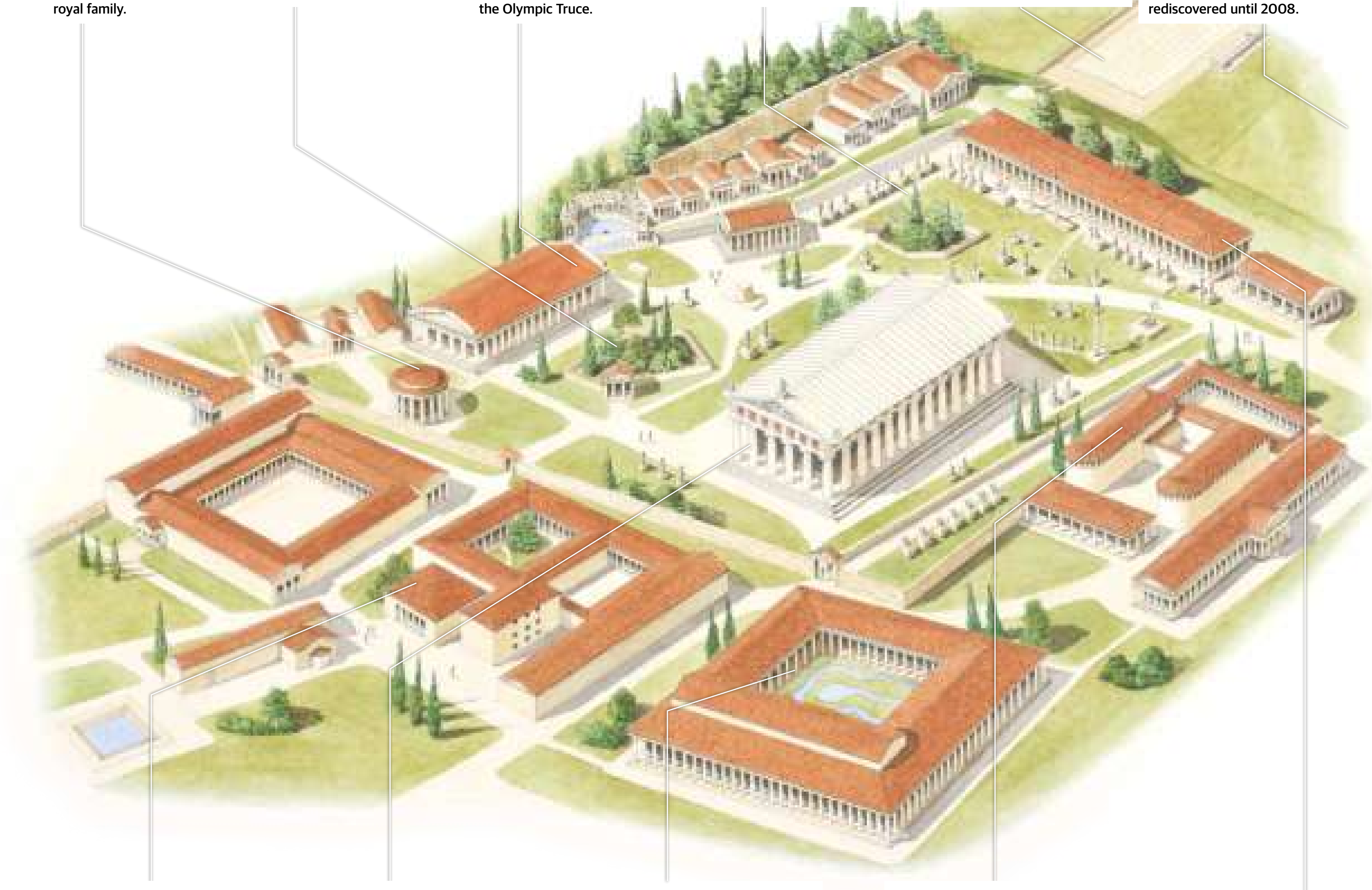
Spectators had good reason to be thankful, especially since the Games were celebrated in the scorching heat of August, when conditions could be horrendous. For the five days surrounding the new moon, those tens of thousands of spectators, who could not afford to stay at the Leonidaion - a 'hotel' built by a far-sighted entrepreneur in 360 BCE - pitched tents or slept rough outside the sanctuary with little running water and no sanitation, a jostling mêlée of increasingly rank bodies. For some, such as Epictetus, the abiding memory was "the sunburn and the filth… the cacophony, the din, the jostling, the shoving, the crowding, and so many people, each absorbed in doing his own thing". However, even he admitted: "I think you're happy to put up with all of this when you think of the splendour of the spectacles."

### ATHLETES

Being a masculine religious festival in honour of dead heroes and the great god Zeus, women, with the one exception of the Priestess of Demeter, were forbidden to attend the Games - though a parallel four-yearly women's festival was held at Olympia in honour of the goddess Hera. Gender was not the only restriction. No convicted murderer could enter unless they had first undergone a lengthy

## The sanctuary of Olympia in the 2nd century

Bristling with statues of victorious athletes, Olympia was dominated by the marble-roofed Temple of Zeus. Beyond Pelops' grave-mound, the original wooden columns of the Temple of Hera (700 BCE) were gradually replaced in stone, while to the northeast the stadium was separated from the sanctuary by an artificial rise



**Philippeion**
Built to commemorate Philip II's victory in battle, this exquisite rotunda housed statues not of gods but of the Macedonian royal family.

**Grave mound of Pelops**
Surrounded by white poplar trees, here, beneath the August full moon, priests slaughtered a black ram, letting its blood soak the earth for the hero's ghost to drink.

**Temple of Hera**
This 7th century BCE temple housed an archaic statue of the seated goddess with Zeus standing beside her, and the 'Discus of Iphitus', inscribed with the terms of the Olympic Truce.

**Zanes statues**
Overlooked by a row of temple-like treasuries, the statues were paid for from fines on cheating competitors, named and shamed on bases which still survive today.

**Stadium**
Races on the packed-earth track, 180m in length (the distance the Greeks called a 'stade'), were watched by spectators standing on the manmade mound surrounding three sides.

**To Hippodrome**
The 180m-long Hippodrome, scene of the thrilling horse- and chariot-races, was an elliptical race track. Buried in silt by the flooding River Alpheus, its site was not rediscovered until 2008.

**Phidias' Workshop**
An exact replica of the interior of Zeus' Temple (save for the addition of windows), Phidias created the god's gold and ivory sculpture here before assembling it in situ.

**Temple of Zeus**
Adorned with exterior sculptures showing mythological scenes, the temple housed a 12m-high seated statue of Zeus faced in gold and ivory, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

**Leonidaion**
73m square and constructed between 330 and 320 BCE by Leonidas of Naxos, this proto-hotel featured a central courtyard with fragrant shrubs and splashing fountains.

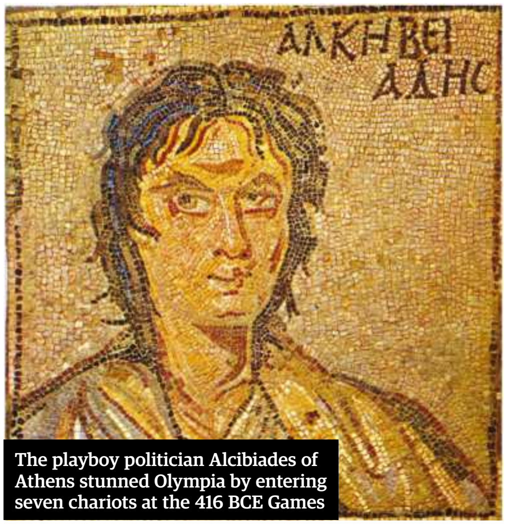
**Bouleuterion**
In this complex of two apsidal buildings flanking a central chamber with a colonnaded frontage, the Olympic Council met, presided over by a forbidding statue of Zeus Horkios ('Zeus, Oath God').

**Stoa of the Echoes**
This stoa (portico), 90m long, was begun in the mid 4th century BCE. Excellent acoustics made it the ideal setting for contests between trumpeters.

purification ritual and all participants were required to speak fluent Greek. Theoretically, any free man could take part, irrespective of social status. Indeed, the flamboyant Alcibiades refused to participate in any sport except chariot racing, the preserve of the rich, because it would mean competing with people of a lower class.

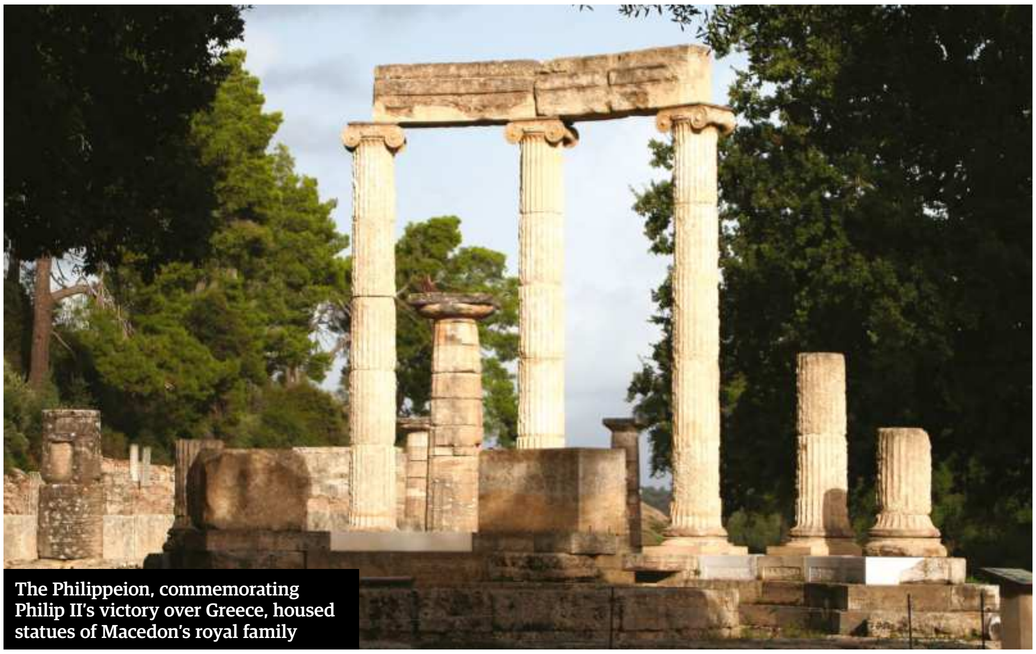
The only other category involved age. There were a handful of contests for boys: boxing, wrestling, the ‘stade’ race, and - for one year only in 628 BCE - the pentathlon. For every other competition, athletes had to be be adults over 20. A month before the Games began, all were required to gather at Elis, the city that controlled the Festival. Here, they were compelled to train and compete in initial heats under the stern watch of the Hellanodikai (‘Judges of the Greeks’), while decisions were made about who should compete in which event.

It was now, too, that age categories were decided, something that without supporting documentation could be very sensitive. Sometimes, judgements were controversial. In 468 BCE, Pherias of Aegina was prevented from taking part in the men’s wrestling because he looked too young. Another contestant, Nicasylos of Rhodes, was so well-developed that he was made to wrestle as an adult even though he was only 18. He won his match, as well as others elsewhere, but so brutal were the contests that he died at 20.



The playboy politician Alcibiades of Athens stunned Olympia by entering seven chariots at the 416 BCE Games

It was participants in contact sports who attracted the greatest interest and controversy. Perhaps the most famous was the wrestler Milo, victorious at five successive Olympics over 20 years. Stories about his strength were numerous, and when a neighbouring city attacked his hometown of Croton in south Italy, Milo dressed in a lion skin and strode out to meet them wielding a club. Believing him to be Heracles reincarnated, the invaders fled. Even Milo’s death was sensational. The travel writer Pausanias reports that “somewhere in the Crotonian territory he came across a tree of dry wood split open and held with wedges. Milo decided to put his hands inside the tree, but the wedges slipped and he was held fast. Then the wolves found him. These beasts are particularly abundant in the territory of Croton.”



The Philippeion, commemorating Philip II’s victory over Greece, housed statues of Macedon’s royal family

But it was a boxer who first brought the Games into disrepute. All participants were required to meet in the Olympic Council Building to swear an oath over the body of a boar that they would not cheat. However, in 388 BCE, Eupolus of Thessaly was found to have bribed three opponents. The Hellanodikai fined all four men and with the money set up four statues of Zeus, the so-called Zanes, on the path down to the stadium, with inscriptions naming and shaming the guilty parties. The bases of 16 such Zanes can still be seen today.

A more coveted memorial was awarded to the winner of the stade race. Individual cities were usually named each year after their chief magistrate, often leading to confusion for anyone trying to compile more regional chronologies. In the late 5th century BCE, the philosopher Hippias of Elis, wishing to create a universal dating system, invented a solution. He named 776 BCE ‘the year of the first Olympiad, when Coroebus of Elis won the stade’, 772 BCE ‘the year of the first Olympiad,

## Timeline

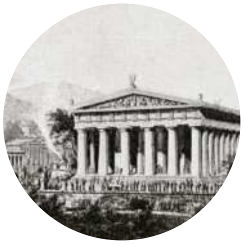
**776 BCE**
The first recorded Olympic Festival is held. The only contest, the stade race, is won by a local baker, Coroebus of Elis.

**724 BCE**
A second contest, the diaulos, is introduced, heralding a flurry of new events, including the pentathlon and wrestling (708 BCE), chariot racing (680 BCE) and horse racing (648 BCE).

**720 BCE**
After Orisippus of Megara won the stade race at the previous games, ‘losing’ his loincloth as he ran, athletes begin to compete naked, possibly believing that nudity made them faster.

**564 BCE**
Arrhichion of Phigalia wins the pankration despite being dead: his opponent, in pain from a dislocated toe, gives up just before Arrhachion dies from strangulation.

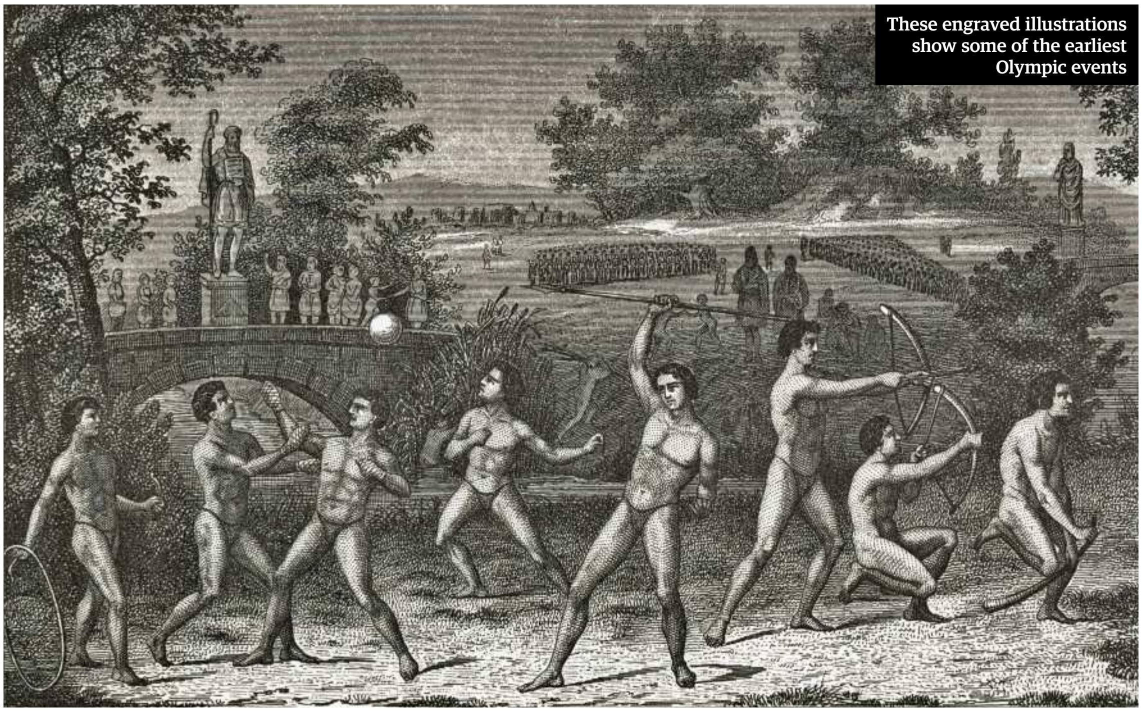
**458 BCE**
Local architect Libon’s Temple of Zeus is completed, paid for from the spoils of war against a neighbouring city-state, and adorned with sculptures showing Pelops, Apollo and Heracles.



**430 BCE**
Phidias of Athens (who also designed the Parthenon) completes his 13-metre tall seated statue of Zeus, faced in gold and ivory, carrying Winged Victory in its outstretched hand.

**416 BCE**
Alcibiades of Athens appropriates the Games for his personal aggrandisement, entering a record seven chariots and treating all the spectators to a banquet.

Dressed in trademark long flowing robes, a charioteer urges on his four-horse team



These engraved illustrations show some of the earliest Olympic events

when Antimachus of Elis won the stade', and so on, with the intervening years numbered accordingly 'the second, third and forth year of the Olympiad'. His system was accepted. From then on, the Greeks effectively began their historical era with the first Olympiad, and the winner of the Olympic 'stade' race and his city were immortalised throughout the Greek-speaking world.

## EVENTS

Although the stade was the first competitive event, after the introduction of the diaulos in 724 BCE others followed swiftly. Mostly these were of three types, the first being running: stade, diaulos, dolichos (4.5 kilometres), and a stade race in armour. The second consisted of trials of strength: boxing, wrestling, pankration (a deadly combination of barbaric brawling and bare-knuckle fight), as well as throwing the javelin and discus, with the third comprising equestrian sports: horse races and races for two-, four- and ten-horse chariots as well as a mule-cart races.

In addition, the pentathlon combined elements of both strength and speed. Once they were introduced, some events, such as the stade race, lasted for the entire life of the Games. Others, such as the mule-cart race, were quietly dropped.

Unlike at other international festivals, such as the Pythian Games held at Delphi in honour of Apollo or the Panathenaic Festival at Athens, the Olympics contained no formal cultural or artistic element. But there were two curious contests that had little to do with sporting prowess. Introduced in 396 BCE, the competitions for trumpeters and heralds became particularly popular when they found a new home in a colonnade built after the stadium was relocated more than 80 metres to the east of the Temple of Zeus. The acoustic of this so-called Stoa of the Echoes caused any sound to reverberate no less than seven times.

One event conspicuous by its absence is the marathon, which was inspired by an Ancient Greek athletic feat. In 490 BCE, the runner Pheidippides raced to bring the news of the Greek victory over the Persians from Marathon to Athens, a distance of just over 46 kilometres. The race was created for the first modern Olympics of 1896, held not at Olympia but in Athens, the new capital of a proudly independent Greece. It marked the dawn of a modern Olympic era, secular games that would be largely unrecognisable to Greece's classical forefathers, not least because of their ethos. Where previously athletes had striven 'always to be best', now, as their new founder Baron de Coubertin proclaimed: 'What is important in life is not to triumph, but to take part; what is essential is not to have won, but to have fought well'.

Scandal mars Pisodorus of Rhodes' win in the boys' boxing match when his trainer is found to be a woman – his mother, who narrowly escapes execution as punishment for attending.
● **388 BCE**

● **356 BCE**
Philip II of Macedon learns of his chariot victory and the birth of his son, Alexander the Great, on the same day. His later Philippeion commemorates his defeat of Greece.

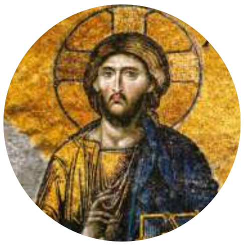
Leonidas of Rhodes wins the stade, diaulos and hoplitodromos races, a feat he repeats in the next two Olympics. His record nine wins is broken only in 2016 by Michael Phelps.
● **164 BCE**

● **40 CE**
Caligula tries to remove the statue of Zeus to Rome, but his workmen refuse to continue when they hear unearthly groans emanating from inside it.

Nero builds a palace and triumphal arch near the hippodrome, 'winning' the ten-horse chariot race despite falling out and failing to complete the course.
● **67 CE**

● **391 CE**
With Christianity now the religion of imperial Rome, Emperor Theodosius bans all pagan worship, but the Olympic Games probably continue in some form until 425 CE.

The statue of Zeus, removed to a patrician's palace in Constantinople in 390 CE, is destroyed by fire, but it has already inspired Byzantine artists' impressions of the face of God.
● **462 CE**



**1896** ●
Inspired by the ancient Games, English public schools and Shropshire's Much Wenlock Olympics, Pierre de Coubertin organises the first modern Olympics in Athens. The Greek Spyros Louis wins the marathon.

© Getty Images

# THE ART OF ARCHITECTURE

The Greeks didn't just build some of the world's most iconic buildings; they inspired future generations to build even more

More than 2,000 years after the heyday of their ancient civilisation, Greek and Greek-influenced buildings are instantly recognisable. Many are iconic, like the skeletal remains on the Acropolis, framed against the Athenian skyline, one of the most famous modern cityscapes.

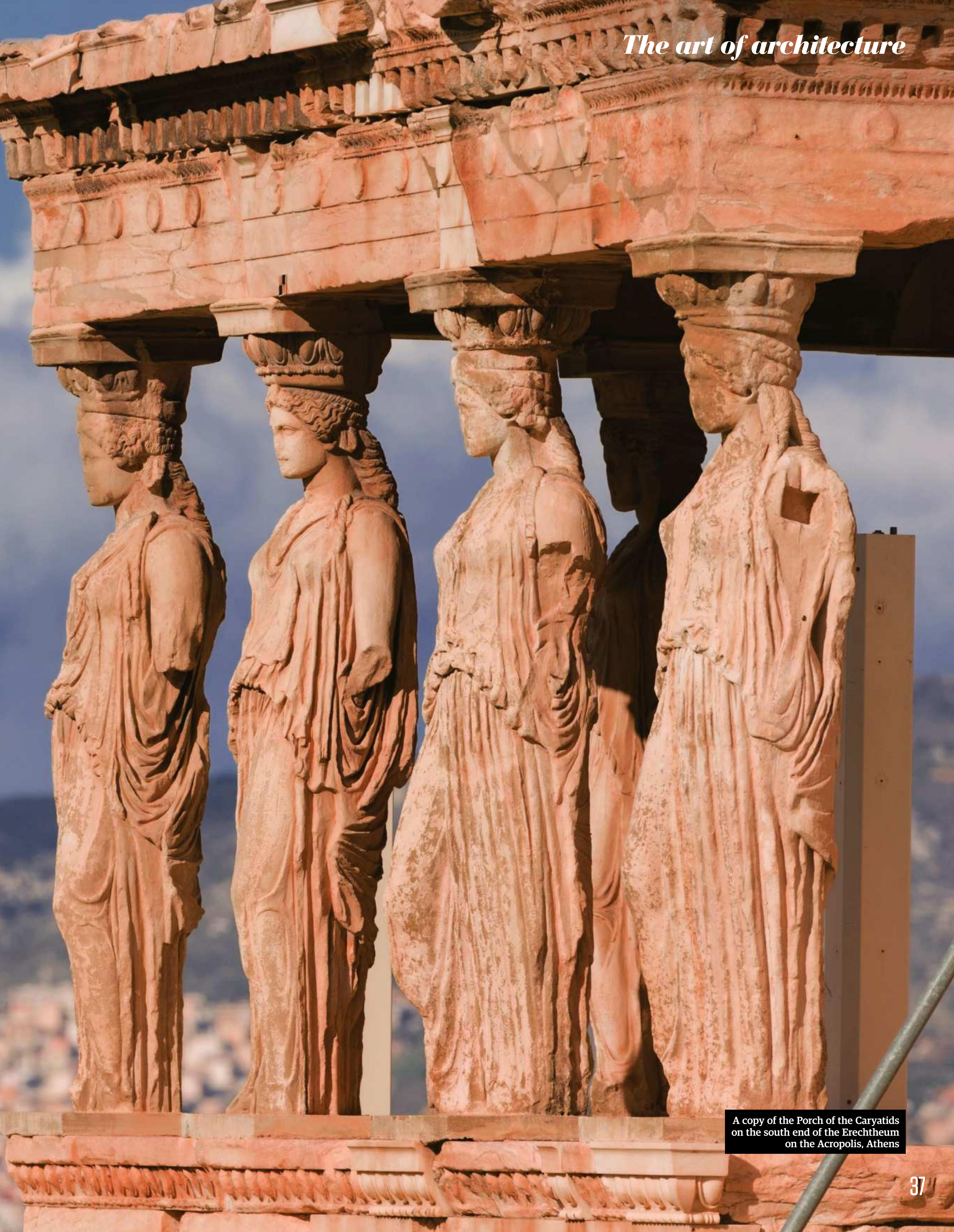
A huge number of public structures in the Western world from the Renaissance onwards are directly influenced by classical Greek architectural style, including famous examples such as the British Museum's façade in London, the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, and the United States Capitol in Washington, DC. The characteristic columns and pediments, arranged with careful attention to symmetry and proportion, are obvious and distinctive wherever they appear. They are emblematic of the ancient Mediterranean civilisation.

> One thing that didn't survive in the original structures or the later imitations was colour – the Greeks painted buildings

The legacy isn't only physical; Greek architectural principles were the foundation for Roman – and then later Western – theory and practice, in particular for public architecture, while the Greeks also invented types of buildings, such as stadiums and theatres. Even buildings that don't look obviously 'classical' often obey the rules of proportion that the Greeks established.

The classical Greek style is most often seen in public buildings, and this is not by chance. The classical Greek world (roughly from 500 BCE to the time of Alexander the Great in the late 4th century BCE) had few mansions or palaces. The aristocracy and very rich didn't live in stately homes or anything similar; that was to come later. What we think of as typical Greek architecture was seen in temples and public buildings. These structures were glorifications of gods and cities, even if they were also glorifications of those who paid for and built them by extension. This public character explains one of the peculiarities of the time.

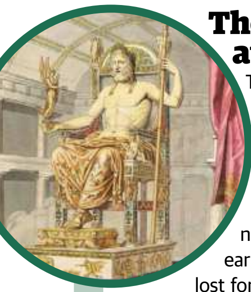
Although the Greek countryside was full of people in the classical period – by the standards of the time – it has almost no notable architecture. For the most part, there is only the odd isolated rural temple. By far the greatest number of 'important' or 'typical' buildings were in urban centres.



A copy of the Porch of the Caryatids on the south end of the Erechtheum on the Acropolis, Athens

## The Greek wonders of the world

Awe-inspiring architecture, from striking statues to impressive temples



### The Statue of Zeus at Olympia

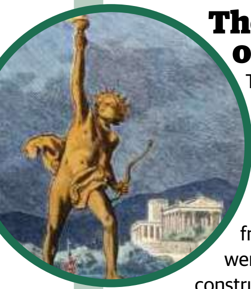
This 12-metre-high statue of Zeus was the work of Phidias. Zeus's skin was made from ivory, and his robes from hammered gold. With the advent of Christianity, however, the temple fell into neglect and, having survived an earthquake, the statue was finally lost forever – possibly to fire.

### The Temple of Artemis at Ephesus

Constructed over 120 years in what is now Turkey, the temple was completed in 550 BCE. In 356 BCE, Herostratus burned it to the ground, saying that by destroying it he would earn everlasting fame. It was twice rebuilt, but destroyed forever in 401 CE.

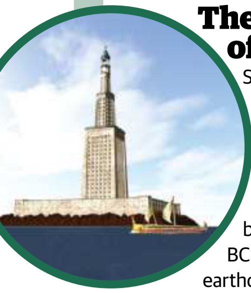
### The Mausoleum of Halicarnassus

The tomb of Persian satrap Mausolus is in Halicarnassus, birthplace of Herodotus. Halicarnassus was in Persian-occupied Asia Minor, and is now the city of Bodrum in Turkey. After Mausolus died in 353 BCE, his wife commissioned the tomb. She joined him in it when she died.



### The Colossus of Rhodes

The island of Rhodes built a 34-metre-high statue of its patron, Helios, god of the Sun, from 292–280 BCE to mark its victory over an invading army. Melted-down bronze and iron from the weapons of the defeated were used extensively in the construction of it.



### The Lighthouse of Alexandria

Sometimes called the Pharos (it was built on the island of Pharos), the lighthouse was almost 140 metres high. Its mirror reflected sunlight by day and firelight by night. Built by Ptolemy I Soter around 280 BCE, it was damaged in several earthquakes, and by 1480 it had gone.

In fact, as time went on, the centres became increasingly crowded and even jumbled, especially in the more prosperous cities. This raised early town-planning arguments, with some people proposing and putting into practice organised city layouts on a rectangular gridiron pattern, and others claiming that this way of doing things was fundamentally un-Greek. The philosopher Aristotle even argued that sprawling centres and haphazard streets were a good defence against invaders, because they were confusing. Given how often the Greek cities were at war, especially with each other, this was no small point. It wasn't until the Hellenistic age, after Alexander the Great's conquests, that town planning would come into its own.

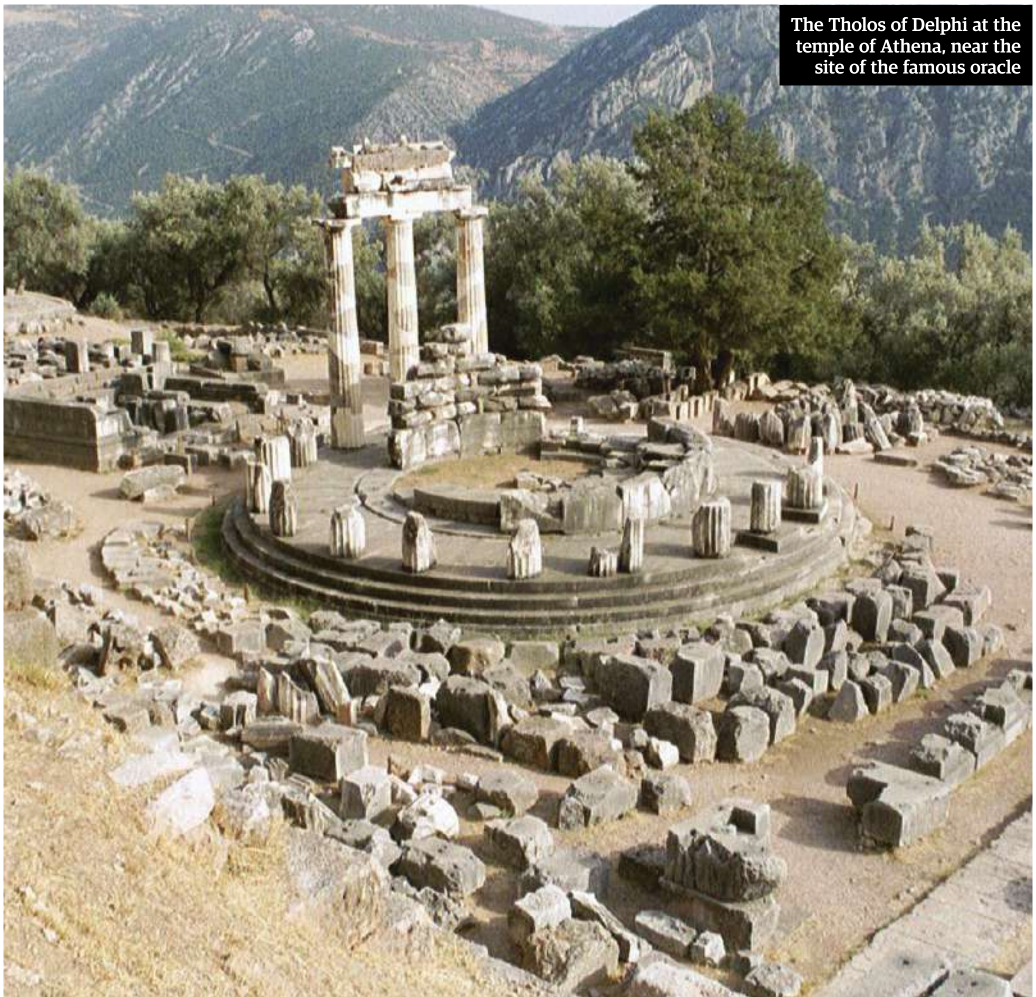
All of the early 'prestige' buildings were temples, and throughout the early and classical periods, they would remain pre-eminent. At first, they were largely constructed from wood, rubble and clay. As so often, the Greeks then learned a trick, or rather a lot of tricks, from the Egyptians, and started to use finished stone. This revolutionised Greek architecture, and the template for later building was established.

This emphasis on religious buildings accounts for one of the defining features of Greek public architecture. Their temples were not churches, or even cathedrals; they were not meant to be worshipped in. They were quite literally houses for gods. Inside might be the cult statue and past offerings to the god – quite sumptuous treasure, or even the city's financial reserves in some cases – and a few relatively simple rooms. The altar would be outside the temple. Temples were designed to be looked at from the outside, not actually used.

This might explain why you can call Greek buildings many things – elegant, imposing,

In architecture, orders were the arrangement of types of columns to support the entablature, or the upper part of a building

> "Their temples were not churches; they were not meant to be worshipped in. They were quite literally houses for gods"



The Tholos of Delphi at the temple of Athena, near the site of the famous oracle

**The Temple of Apollo at Corinth was built around 540 BCE, making these some of the older standing ruins in Greece**

> "It wasn't until the 6th century BCE that non-religious public buildings started to be constructed in Ancient Greece"

magnificent – but not comfortable or lived-in. They are there to strike awe; to be gazed on and admired. This tendency persisted to a large degree with secular public buildings until in the Hellenistic period architects began to also give the neglected interiors their full attention.

Greek architectural styles are traditionally split into three 'orders': Doric, Ionic and Corinthian. The Doric order was developed in the Peloponnese peninsula in southern mainland Greece in the 7th century BCE. The Ionic order followed in the next century, and originated east of the Aegean Sea, while the Corinthian order is essentially a later offshoot of the Ionic, and didn't become important until the Roman period.

Doric, the earliest and most popular order, was especially important in mainland Greece and the western colonies. It was also a transitional style of sorts, taking the old wooden architecture and remaking it with stone. Ionic was a lighter, and much more elaborate and decorative style, with Corinthian being a further development in architecture of this trend.

One of the remarkable features of classical architecture was its consistency over the Greek world, spread as it was over the mainland and islands, Asia Minor, Sicily and mainland Italy, and Spain. A citizen from Syracuse in Greek Sicily could travel to Corinth and in the Peloponnese and find a familiar style of public buildings. Leading architects and sculptors – who were closely involved in architecture, with sculptures and friezes being an integral part of public buildings – travelled widely and freely between all of the cities. There was a great deal of variation and individuality in the details of these great structures, but the essential style was very coherent. This was to change somewhat in the Hellenistic period, when the focus and purpose in architecture switched from community to individual.

The historical and cultural context obviously played a great part in the development of architecture. The classical period was above all the public period, where great buildings were temples or civic structures in the agora. There were great theatres and sports stadiums. Nowhere was this more true than in mighty, rich and democratic Athens. In the west, buildings might still be the pet projects of individual rulers – of tyrants – but for the most part, they were truly for the public.

> Doric columns were relatively simple and didn't have bases, unlike the Ionic and Corinthian ones

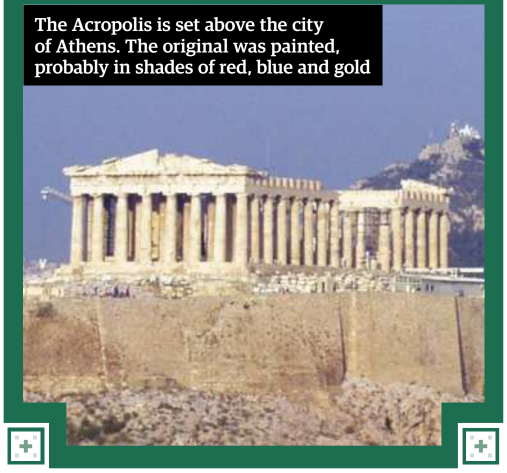
Later, after the conquests of Alexander the Great, the re-establishment of monarchy in the Greek world, and close contact with the east, this changed, and the emphasis shifted from the public to the individual. There was greater diversity of building types and styles. Nonetheless, the results were still unquestionably recognisable as 'Greek'.

## The new and improved Acropolis

The original Acropolis buildings were destroyed by the Persians in 480 BCE, and the new buildings, constructed in the second half of the 5th century, were a statement of civic pride. The Acropolis was a public space, built by and for the Athenian people. Previously, undertakings of this magnitude had been the preserve of great kings and emperors.

The Parthenon temple of the goddess Athena on the Acropolis was unprecedentedly vast, and built entirely from marble – 22,000 tons of it. Its size allowed for many new features. One of the most notable aspects of the new Acropolis was the blending of the Doric and Ionic orders. The Parthenon was essentially Doric, but with an Ionic frieze, while the Erechtheum – a temple for multiple cults – was Ionic. The Propylaea (gateway) contains columns from both orders.

It is often said that the Acropolis and the three major buildings it contained are individually and collectively the culmination and high point of the classical tradition. They blend tradition and innovation in subtly balanced precision, with extraordinary attention given to every detail. It was a bold statement by the Athenian democracy, made possible by the wealth she was garnering from her empire, and the confidence she had gained from her success in the Persian wars.



**The Acropolis is set above the city of Athens. The original was painted, probably in shades of red, blue and gold**

The most obvious legacy was seen in Rome. The Romans absorbed, learned from and expanded the architectural principles of the Greeks. Their superior engineering skill – and perhaps their confidence – saw them employing arches, vaults and domes, which the Greeks mostly avoided, and otherwise extending the range of what was possible. They paid much more attention to private buildings, to villas and palaces and stately living. Their vast empire spread their architecture – and ultimately the Greek legacy – even further.

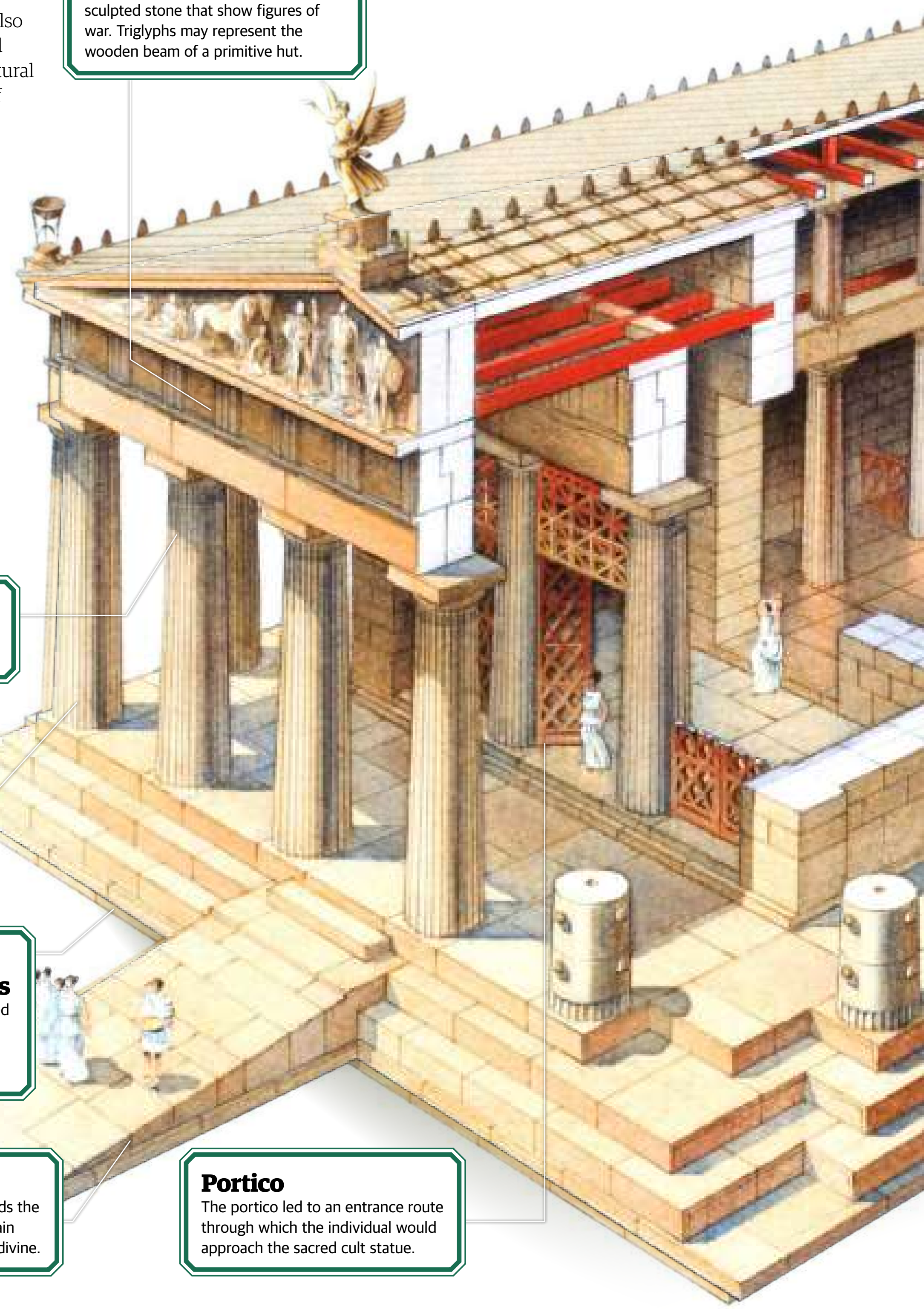
The legacy isn't only physical, of course. Greek architectural principles were the very foundation for later Western theory and practice, in particular for public architecture. And every time we take a seat in a stadium or theatre, we are sitting in a what was first a Greek invention.

# GREEK TEMPLES

## Inside these multi-use architectural marvels

The temple acted as a cosmic generator. It was regarded as a dwelling designed for the gods and was also seen as a reception area for prayer, magical petition and divination. It also became a political symbol that emphasised the might and power of the state through ancient architectural achievement. The temple, now the most famous symbol of ancient Greece, was also functional – it housed important official offices and acted as a storage centre and a treasury.

The Doric temple of Segesta



**Metopes and triglyphs**
Metopes are individual sections of sculpted stone that show figures of war. Triglyphs may represent the wooden beam of a primitive hut.

**Column flutes**
The number of flutes on each column changed with each architectural style.

**Columns**
Valued for their beautiful architectural features, columns were also seen as pillars of the sky.

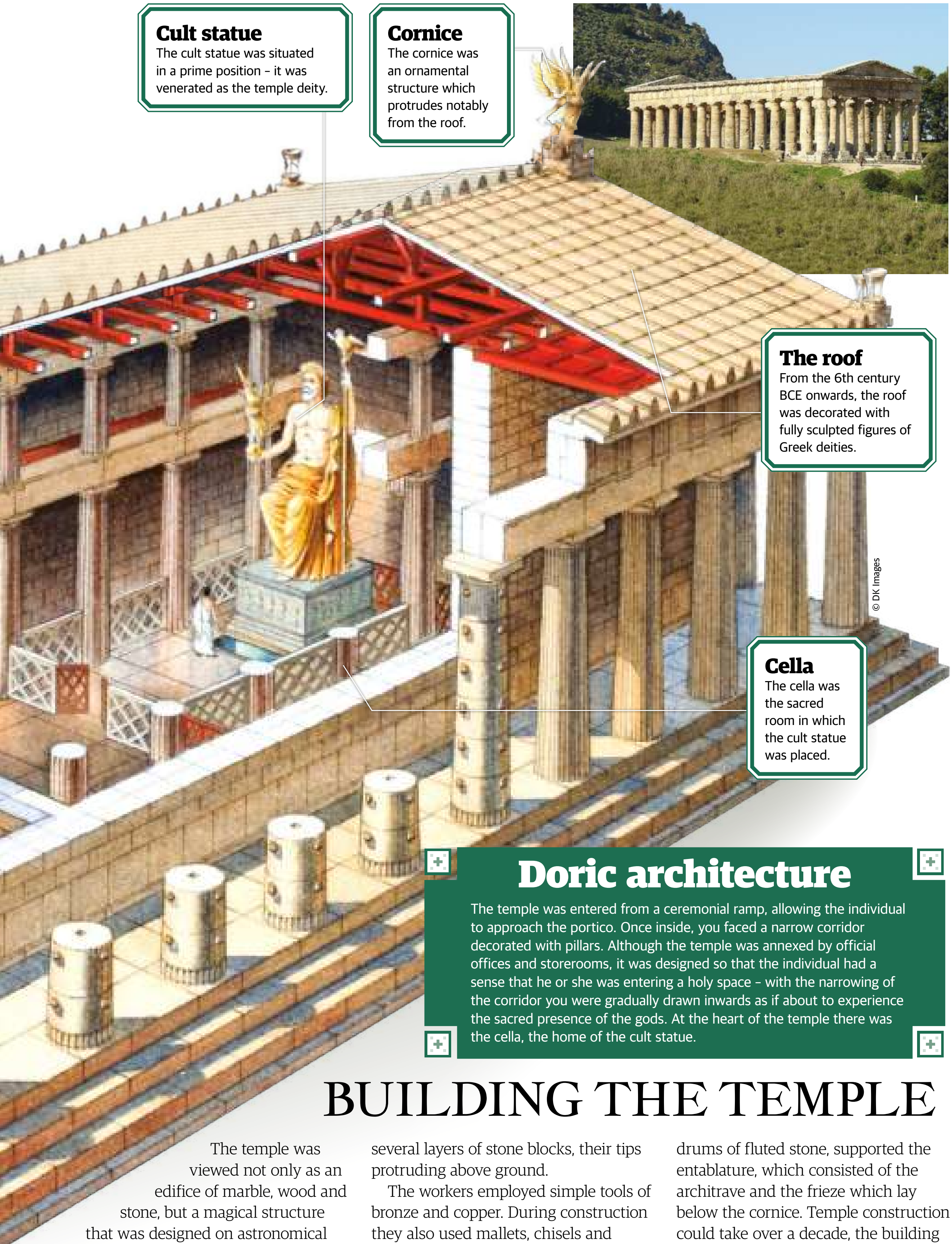
**Stereobate or foundation blocks**
Foundation blocks were placed at the base of the temple. Doric columns were directly built upon the stereobate.

**The ramp**
A ceremonial causeway. It leads the individual from the earthly plain and guides him or her to the divine.

**Portico**
The portico led to an entrance route through which the individual would approach the sacred cult statue.

### THE PARTHENON

**Location:**
Athenian Acropolis, Greece
**Length of construction:**
447-438 BCE
**Designer:** Phidias
**Type of building/purpose:**
Temple and treasury
**Type of architecture:**
Classical – Doric
**Cost of construction:**
In modern terms, it is estimated that the Parthenon cost over £3 million
**Architects:**
Ictinos and Callicrates
**Area coverage:** 69.5m x 30.9m



**Cult statue**
The cult statue was situated in a prime position – it was venerated as the temple deity.

**Cornice**
The cornice was an ornamental structure which protrudes notably from the roof.

**The roof**
From the 6th century BCE onwards, the roof was decorated with fully sculpted figures of Greek deities.

**Cella**
The cella was the sacred room in which the cult statue was placed.

© DK Images

## Doric architecture

The temple was entered from a ceremonial ramp, allowing the individual to approach the portico. Once inside, you faced a narrow corridor decorated with pillars. Although the temple was annexed by official offices and storerooms, it was designed so that the individual had a sense that he or she was entering a holy space – with the narrowing of the corridor you were gradually drawn inwards as if about to experience the sacred presence of the gods. At the heart of the temple there was the cella, the home of the cult statue.

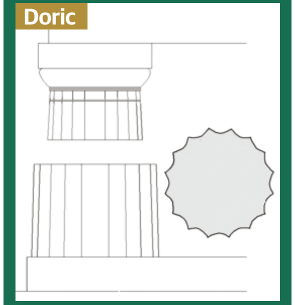
# BUILDING THE TEMPLE

The temple was viewed not only as an edifice of marble, wood and stone, but a magical structure that was designed on astronomical principles. With this in mind, early construction began with the foundation ceremony, creating a base that is known as a stereobate. This consisted of several layers of stone blocks, their tips protruding above ground.

The workers employed simple tools of bronze and copper. During construction they also used mallets, chisels and ropes to create a further foundation block called a crepidoma, which acted as a base for the columns and walls. The columns, which were made of several drums of fluted stone, supported the entablature, which consisted of the architrave and the frieze which lay below the cornice. Temple construction could take over a decade, the building often covered 115m x 55m of land and boasted columns that reached 15m to 20m in height. On completion, the temple was decorated by craftsmen.

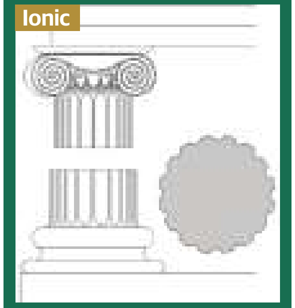
## How to identify Greek columns

### Doric



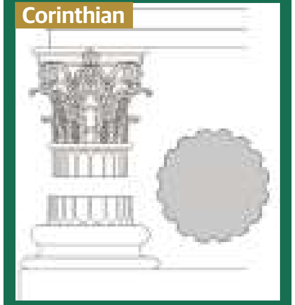
These columns are short, heavy structures with plain capitals. They have no base and their height measures four to eight times their diameter. They are decorated with 20 flutes. The base of the column was placed directly on the stylobate (or foundation stone).

### Ionic



Ionic columns are graceful and slender – they differ from the Doric in that they are designed with a large base for extra support. They are easily distinguished by their large scrolled features. The Ionic column has 24 flutes.

### Corinthian



The Corinthian column is ornate and elaborate, and is often more appealing than the Doric and Ionic columns described above. The column is tall and slim. Designed with 24 flutes it is crafted with a scrumptious capital, which is sculpted with scrolls and acanthus leaves.

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# THE GREEKS AND THEIR RELIGION

Ancient Greek religion was diverse, contradictory, and endlessly inventive, much like the Greeks themselves

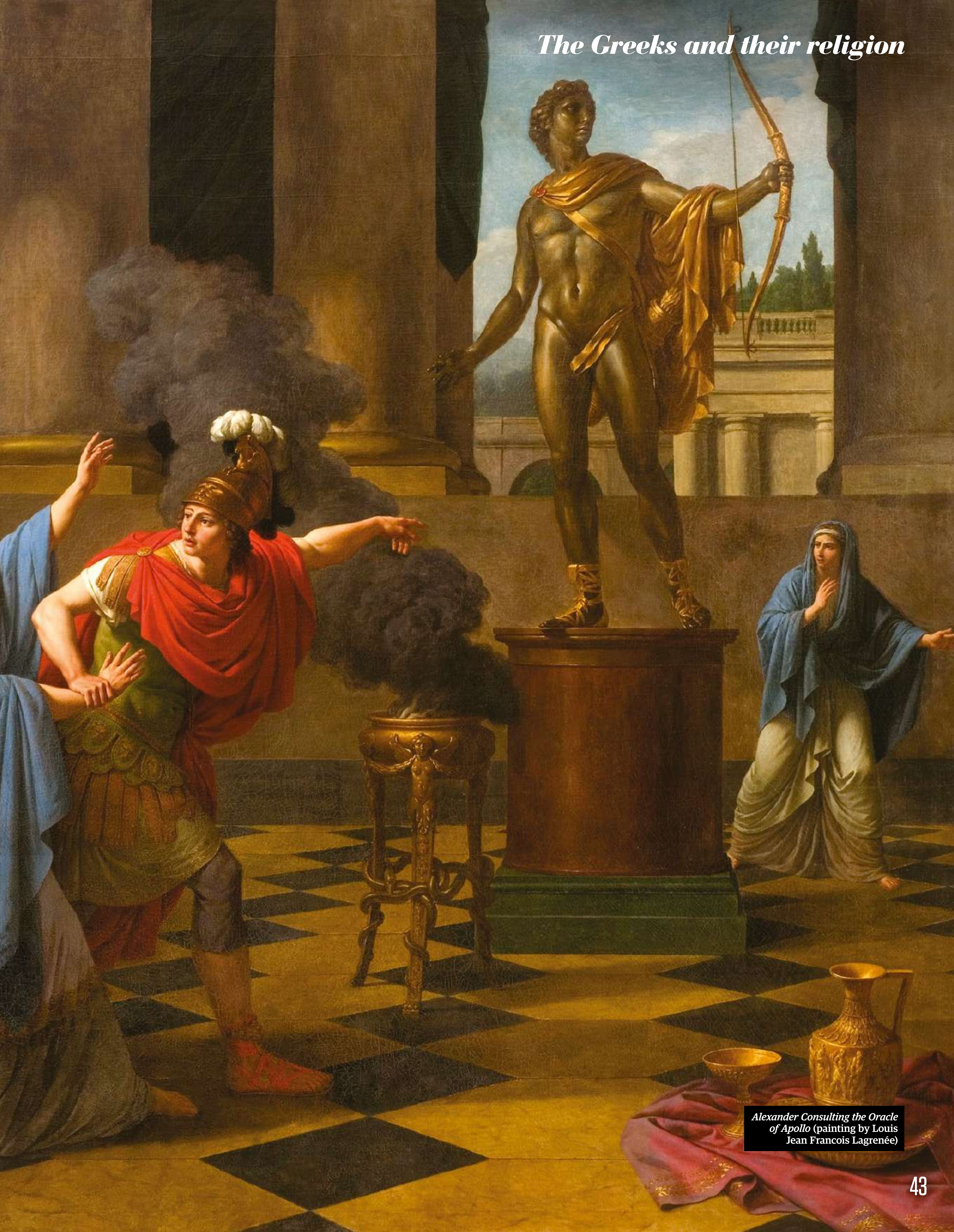
Greek religion had no formal set of beliefs or practices to which all had to conform or accept. The Greeks had their mythological stories, many of which were shared all over their country, but they did not develop a rigorous system of beliefs about them. The Greeks, for example, had no one sacred text, such as the Bible, at the core of their religion. Often Greek myths differed from place to place, as well as the particular stories told about the gods and heroes.

Sometimes these stories were wildly contradictory of others. Several gods had clearly overlapping areas of authority that could not be reconciled. Greek mythology was the product of centuries of unregulated storytelling by some of history's most creative and innovative people. Their myths explained the origins of the gods, the nature of the world in which the Greeks lived, and what they believed to be their history.

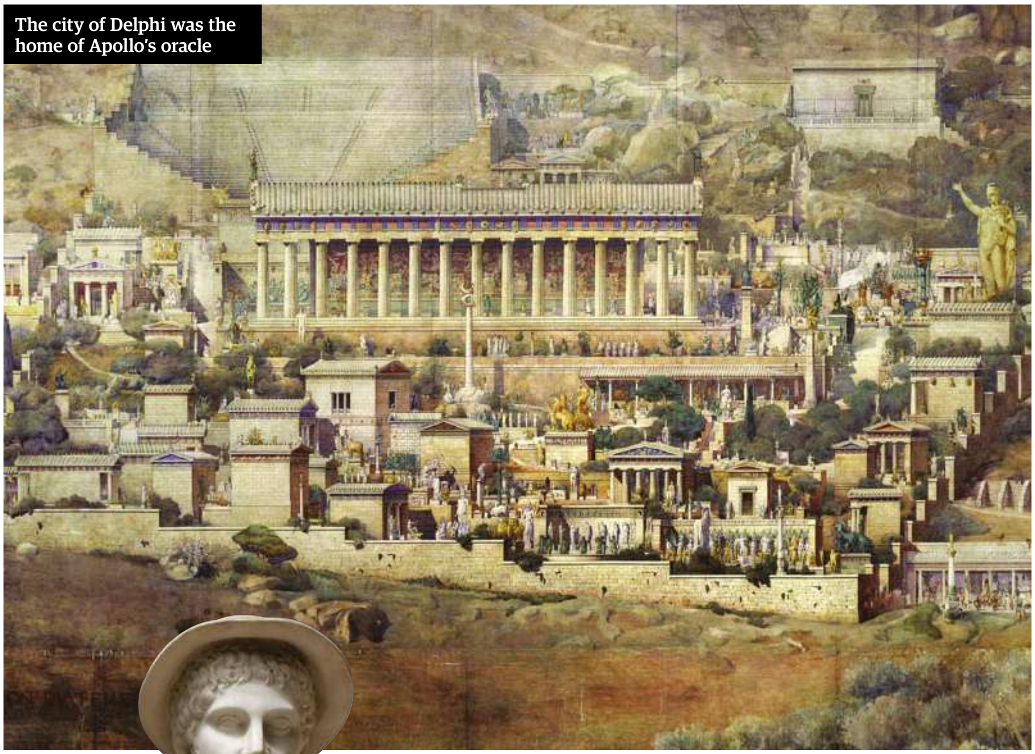
> Families believed that they might be able to find one another in the afterlife if the members were buried close to one another

If their mythology might appear to be lacking coherence at times, that is a modern judgement that would have puzzled the Greeks themselves. Furthermore, unlike the case in modern times, the Ancient Greeks lacked a concept of a clear division between the realm of religion and that of non-religious life. For them, it was a seamless whole, with the gods, of which there were many, demanding and receiving the worship and sacrifice delivered by both the state and by private individuals regularly.

In fact, the Greeks had no specific word for 'religion' as we might understand it. Religion was simply part of their everyday life. Rituals were conducted at all important public and private events and a deity was routinely consulted before any major undertaking. A fortunate result in one's life was often responded to with a votive offering to a god, vows of thanks, or some other public form of recognition of the particular deity to whom success was owed.



*Alexander Consulting the Oracle of Apollo* (painting by Louis Jean Francois Lagrenée)



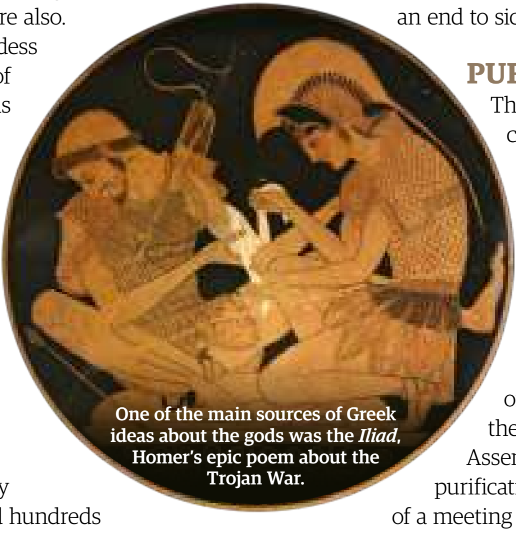
The city of Delphi was the home of Apollo's oracle

Hermes, the Greek messenger god, depicted here in a Roman copy of an original Greek statue

> "There were 12 major gods and goddesses of the Greeks. These were the Olympians"

There were 12 major gods and goddesses of the Greeks. These were the Olympians, so named because they reside atop Mount Olympus. Zeus was the lord and master of them all. Hera, his wife (and sister) was his queen. With him also was Aphrodite, goddess of love, bright Apollo, and his virgin sister Artemis the Huntress. Demeter, goddess of growing things, was there also. Athena there was, the goddess of wisdom and patroness of heroes. Hephaestus too was an Olympian. He was the lame but matchless smith of the gods. Hermes was Zeus' fleet-footed messenger. Brutal Ares was the lord of war, while Poseidon was the god of the sea and its creatures. Rounding out the Olympian pantheon was Dionysus, the god of wine and revelry.

In addition to the mighty Olympians, the Greeks had hundreds of other lesser deities. Having so many gods of their own meant they were relatively open-minded when it came to the gods of non-Greeks. They readily identified or equated foreign gods with similar ones of their own pantheon. They had no cause to deny the existence of anyone else's gods. The easy-going attitude toward the deities of foreign peoples did not mean the Greeks were unserious about religion. Religious practices were taken very seriously. Treaties between city-states were solemnised by oaths sworn by the gods as well as sacrifices. Breaking such a treaty might bring about a terrible disaster.



One of the main sources of Greek ideas about the gods was the *Iliad*, Homer's epic poem about the Trojan War.

The gods of the Greeks had their own priests and priestesses. These men and women oversaw the rites performed in honour of the gods and tended their temples, shrines, and sanctuaries. They did not involve themselves with the spiritual concerns of the worshippers. There was little in the way of formal doctrine for priests to know or follow. There were several features to worship that all Greeks had in common.

## PRAYING

Prayers were the usual means by which people communicated with the gods. The primary parts of a prayer were the invocation, in which the person called upon the deity using his name, title, and abode; the argument, in which the supplicant gave reasons to the god as to why he should help, which might include a recitation of good deeds performed by the mortal or making a note that the god was known for his helpfulness; and the prayer itself, which was a request for some kind of divine aid. Many kinds of relief might be sought, such as an end to sickness or drought.

## PURIFICATION

The cleansing of the community from pollution (or miasma), was of enormous importance to the Greeks. Private individuals might be purified by washing. Often purification was undertaken before some important action or perhaps as required by the calendar. The Athenian Assembly underwent ritual purification before the beginning of a meeting by having a sacrificed piglet carried around the members. Sometimes a community might undergo a mass purification driving out human scapegoats.

Ritual purification could be effected by washing or sprinkling. Fumigation was also used, along with seawater and water drawn from a sacred spring. Sacrifices would also suffice for purification, with the blood of the victim used to wash away the pollution of an unclean person.

## SACRIFICES

Sacrifices were of vast importance in Greek worship. Both animals and vegetables were seen

as appropriate sacrifices to the gods. With animals, the victim was brought to the altar of a god in a procession where it was sprinkled with water. These drops caused the animal to nod, which to the Greek mind was its acceptance of its sacrifice. Hair was then cut from the animal and a prayer was said to indicate what the sacrificer wished for in return for the sacrifice. The animal was dispatched via a cut to the throat and its meat divided out into portions. The first was for the god. The second, the entrails, were roasted and eaten by the participants of the sacrifice. The rest of the meat was then boiled and given out to those present at the ritual.

## FESTIVALS

Festivals were important parts of Greek public religion. Hundreds of public religious festivals were held every year by the various communities of Ancient Greece. About one in every three days of the year was devoted to a festival of one kind or another. Though particular practices and the deities most prominently honoured might vary from city to city, religion was a central element that served to distinguish Greeks from non-Greeks.

The basic features of a festival were the procession, the sacrifice, and the feast. Outside of these, local practices could differ widely. Most festivals owed their origins to agricultural rituals carried out to ensure a bountiful harvest. They were typically held seasonally, with the Thesmophoria held in honour of Demeter, mostly taking place in the autumn.

Another important festival was the Great Dionysia held annually in Athens. Athens was particularly fond of festivals, and was said to have held twice as many as any other city in Greece. Plays formed an important part of the Dionysia, with four days devoted to such presentations, three for tragedies and the fourth and last was reserved for comedies.

## ORACLES

As might be imagined, with sickness and death ever-present in ancient times, the Greeks were often very anxious about the future. The reasonable desire for reassurance led many to seek out advice from the gods, which was obtained through their oracles. There were ten such oracles who foretold the future, after a fashion, for mortal men. Foremost among these was the oracle of Delphi, where the Pythia, a priestess of Apollo, delivered her pronouncements on behalf of the god. In words attributed to Apollo himself, the very purpose of the construction of his temple there was so that he could give 'unfailing advice through prophetic responses' in it. Another famous oracular shrine was that of Zeus found at Dodona in Epirus. Questions put to the god's oracle were often very personal, such as whether the supplicant should get married or make a voyage across the sea. The response was usually simply yes or no.

Sometimes the answers could be more complicated and have major consequences. Right before the mighty Persians invaded Greece for a second time in 480 BCE, the Athenians consulted the oracle at Delphi. The Athenians knew that their situation was dire, and some were even considering packing up and leaving for safety in Italy. The historian Herodotus tells us that the priestess Aristonice told them that 'only the wooden wall shall not fall.' This baffling response was open to many interpretations, but Themistocles, the leading man at Athens, cleverly interpreted this to mean that they would have to rely on their navy, the ships themselves being made of wood, to fend off the Persians. The Athenians would go on to lead the combined Greek fleet to a great naval victory at Salamis soon afterward.

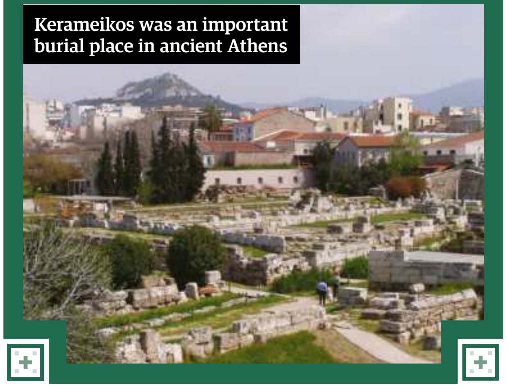
> Apollo's oracle at Delphi continued to offer pronouncements until the shrine was destroyed by the invading Heruli in 267 CE

## Crossing over

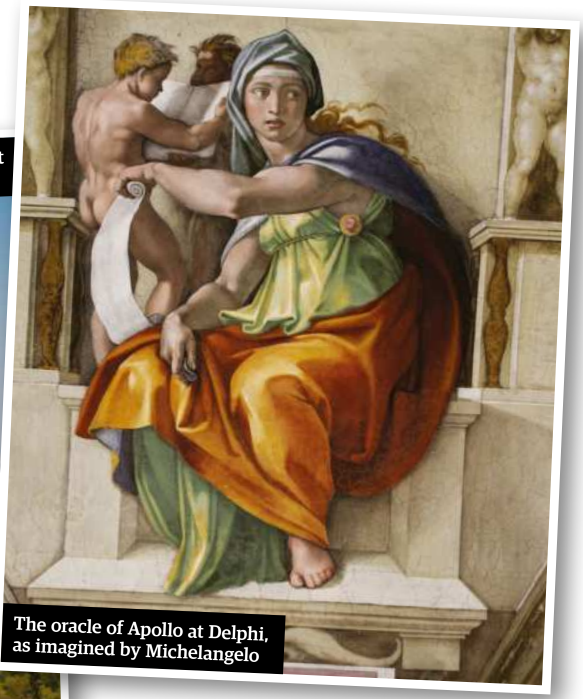
The Greeks believed that the dead needed help in crossing the boundary between the world of the living and Hades, the gloomy realm of the dead. Those left behind sought to bury the dead as quickly as they could, or else the unburied dead would be condemned to roam for many years along the banks of the Styx, the river that marked the boundary between them and Hades.

The retrieval of the bodies of the dead and their proper burial was of tremendous importance to the living. In 405 BCE, ten Athenian admirals won a great naval victory at Arginusae but failed to collect the corpses of their slain sailors on account of a storm that came up suddenly. On their return to Athens they were put on trial for dereliction of duty despite having won the battle. Several of the admirals were executed.

Within days of death, the body was to be buried, with the corpse being carried to the place of burial. Both bodily burial and cremation were available, with cremation thought to be more prestigious. The ashes of the dead were placed in an urn which was itself then buried. Most Athenian burials took place on the roads leading out of the city. Burials inside the city were not allowed because of a wish to avoid pollution by the dead. After interment, the graves were not forgotten, but were tended to regularly by the surviving relatives, especially by the women of the family.


Kerameikos was an important burial place in ancient Athens

The Parthenon was the great temple of Athena in Athens


The oracle of Apollo at Delphi, as imagined by Michelangelo

© Getty Images

# MYTHS & LEGENDS

Discover the captivating tales and essential lessons passed on throughout history by the Ancient Greeks

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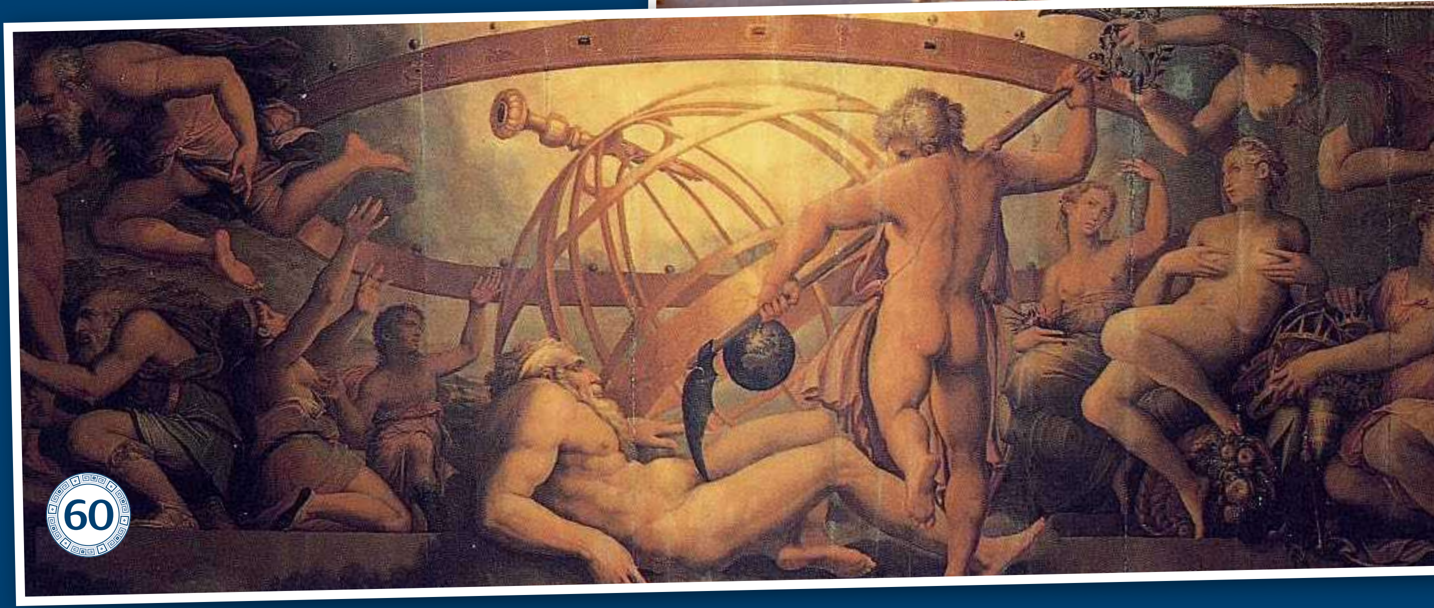

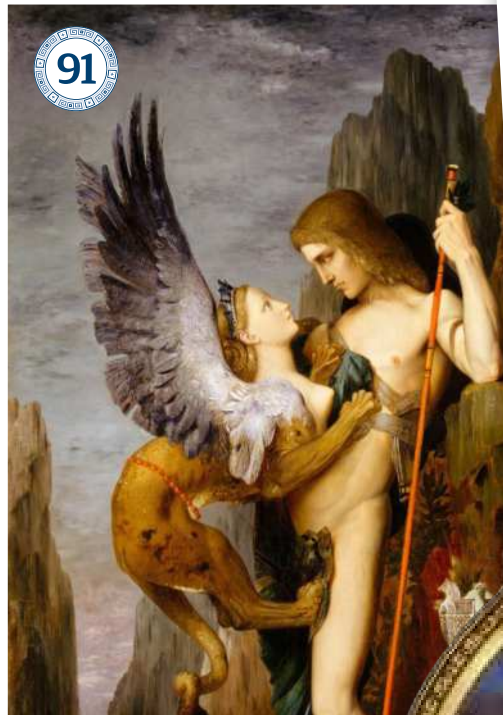
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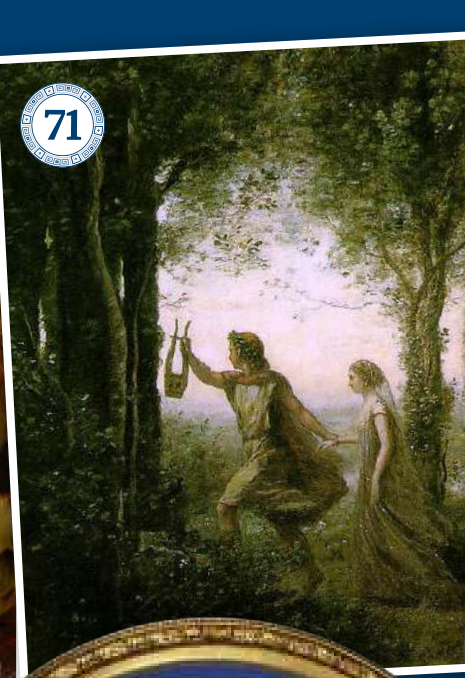
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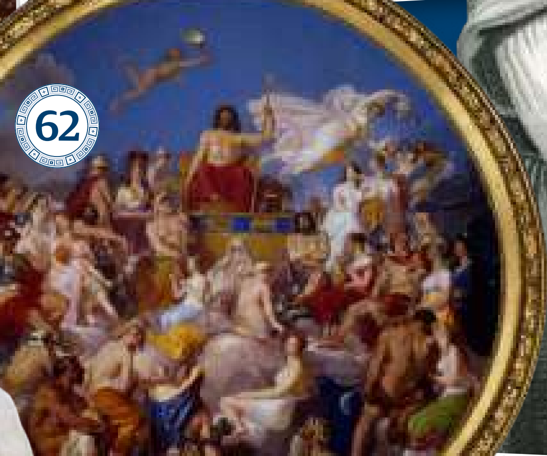
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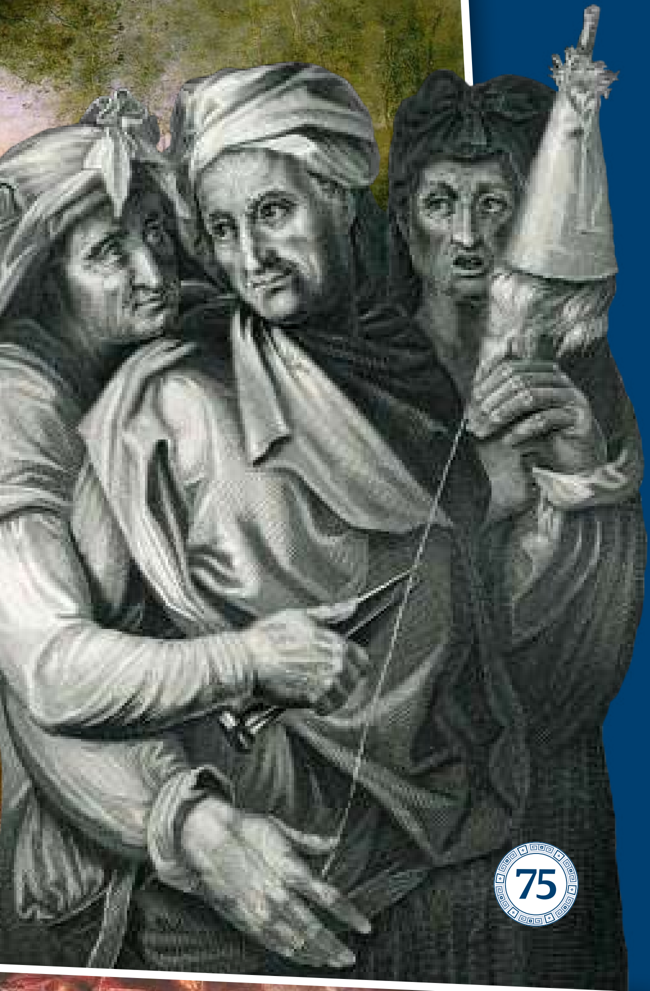
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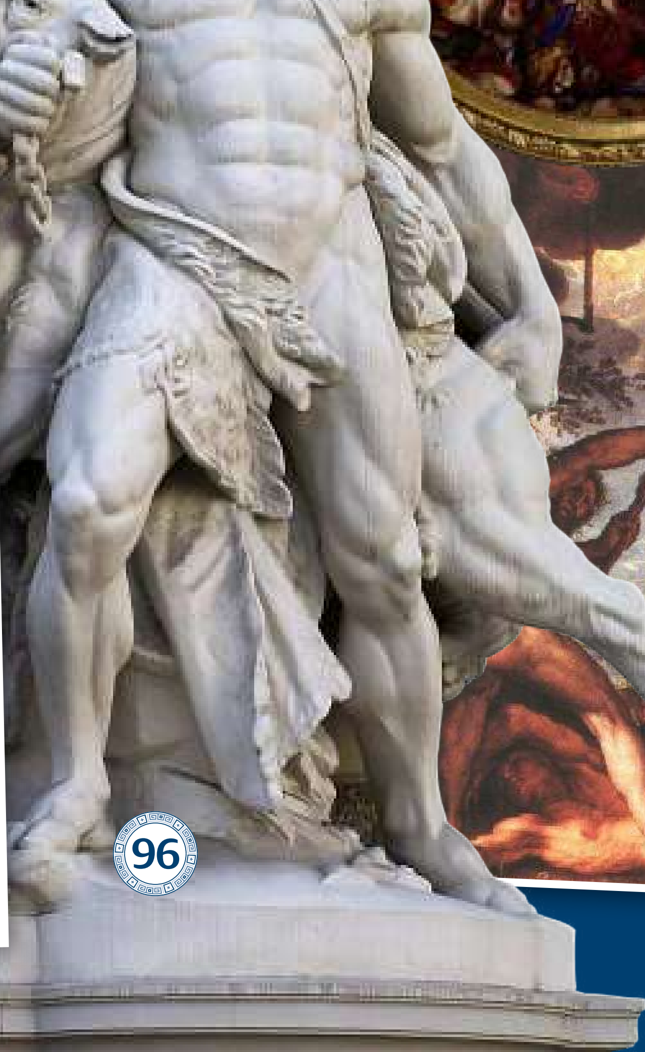
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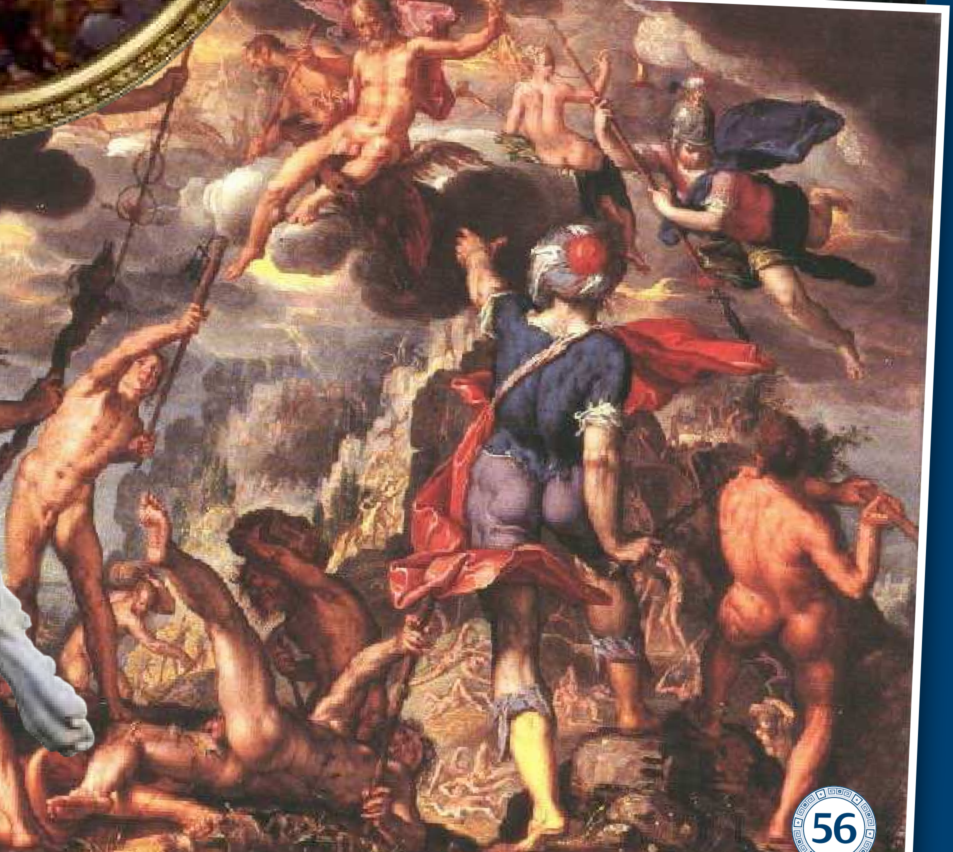
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# GREEK GOD FAMILY TREE

Meet the dysfunctional family that ruled over the ancient Greeks from the summit of Mount Olympus

**Tartarus**

**Typhon**

## Gaia

Gaia was the personification of the Earth itself, regarded as the mother of all creation and the heavenly gods. Despite her matriarchal imagery, in myth Gaia was a rebellious figure who went to war against Zeus and allied with her Titan son, Kronos, against Uranus.

**Pontus**

**Ourea**

## Uranus

The personification of the sky, Uranus was both son and husband to Gaia, and through that union the Titans were created. Uranus despised his children and banished them inside Gaia. In fury Uranus was castrated by his son Kronos, and from the blood the giants, the Erinnyes and the Meliads were born.

**Moros**

**Nemesis**

**Philotes**

**Oneiroi**

**Momus**

## Thanatos

Thanatos was regarded as the personification of death itself – it was believed that he would appear to humans at the end of their life to carry them to the underworld. As he is the twin brother of Hypnos, the god of sleep, many saw this as a sign that death was merely a sleeping state to pass from one life to the next.

- - - - Lover/consort relationship

—— Parent/child relationship

## Chaos

Literally meaning chasm, emptiness or abyss, Chaos was the dark void of space out of which the first objects of existence appeared. In some texts it was referred to as the "womb of darkness". In this way, the first gods were considered to be Chaos' children

**Eros**

**Erebus**

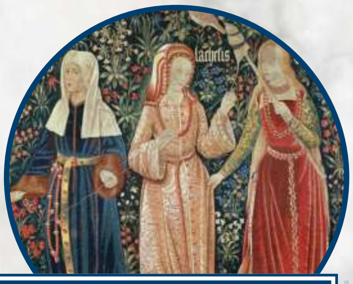
## Nyx

Known as the goddess of the night, Nyx was often portrayed as a veil of darkness that obscured the light of the heavens from Earth. Commonly believed to be the first of all the deities after Chaos, Nyx resided in the dark recesses of the underworld during the day, and later emerged walking hand in hand with Erebus to bring night to the world.

**Aether**

## Hemera

The daughter of Erebus and Nyx, Hemera was the opposite of her parents as goddess of the daytime. Hemera worked in tandem with her brother, Aether, the god of light, bringing light and day to the world.



**Hypnos**

**Apate**

**Geras**

**Eris**

**Oizys**

## Moirai & Keres

Often referred to as the Fates, the Moirai were commonly portrayed as three white-robed women – Clotho (spinner), Lachesis (allotter) and Atropos (the cutter of lives). The Moirai worked independently, controlling the threads of life of every mortal, and even gods were subservient to them. They were seen to represent the inescapable destiny bestowed on all human life.

## Gaia

## Uranus

**Erinyes**

## Gigantes

The Giants were a race that spawned from the spilled blood of Uranus. Despite modern perception, these Giants were not necessarily large, but instead were an aggressive, powerful race. The giants later fought the gods for control of the cosmos in a battle known as the Gigantomachy.

**Meliae**

## Aphrodite

Also known as the goddess of love, Aphrodite was born from the foam in the waters of Paphos after Uranus was mutilated and his genitals cast into the sea. The goddess had many lovers, and it was said that her beauty was so great it threatened to start a war among the gods themselves.

## Oceanus

Oceanus was believed to be the personification of the ocean-stream, a giant river that encircled the globe and considered the father of all life. Unlike his fellow Titans, he withdrew from the war with the Olympians and was considered somewhat of an outlaw. His children were the gods of rivers and nymphs of the springs and fountains.

**Tethys**

**Coeus**

**Phoebe**

**Pleione**

**Iapetus**

**Leto**

## Atlas

Son of Iapetus, Atlas was a Titan who sided with the Titans in their war against the Olympians. As punishment, he was forced to hold up the sky on his shoulders for eternity. He later featured in the labours of Heracles where he tried to trick the demigod into taking the burden from him.

**Maia**

**Hecatonchires**

**Cyclopes**

**Echidna**

**Mnemosyne**

**Hyperion**

**Theia**

**Crius**

## Kronos

Known as the leader of the Titans, Kronos overthrew his own father and ruled over the so called 'Golden Age' where immorality was absent. After hearing he was destined to be slain by his own offspring, he devoured them all except Zeus.

## Rhea

The Titaness mother of the gods, Rhea had six children with her brother Kronos. However, she tricked her husband into not swallowing their final child, Zeus, by handing him a stone instead of the child. Although she had no strong cult around her, she was worshipped in Crete, considered the island of Zeus' infancy.

## Themis

Worshipped as the goddess of divine justice, Themis was able to see the future and it was believed she presided over the very first oracles of Delphi. It was Themis who first delivered the laws and justice and morality to mankind, and she's often depicted with the scales of justice or a sword to cut fact from fiction.

**Zeus**

## Zeus

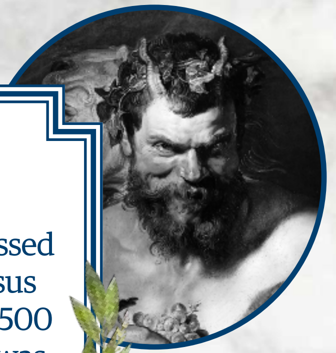
The deity of the sky and thunder, Zeus was worshipped as the king of the gods of Mount Olympus. It was Zeus who gave the other gods their roles, and all were subordinate to him. Infamous for his romantic escapades, he fathered a small horde of children with immortals and mortals alike.

**Semele**

**Maia**

**Leto**

**Hermes**



## Dionysus

As god of wine and 'ritual madness', Dionysus was beloved by the wine-focussed Greek culture. The cults around Dionysus may have stretched back even as far as 1500 to 100 BCE, but the Greeks believed he was the son of Zeus and the mortal Semele and was the last god to enter Olympus.

## Apollo

Son of Zeus, Apollo was god of many things including the Sun, music, poetry and medicine. A complex figure, over time Apollo served a multiple of different functions for different people and cities. His cult was so important that he was one of the very few gods of which the Romans did not change the name.

## Artemis

One of the most widely respected of Greek goddesses, Artemis was the twin sister of Apollo and worshipped as goddess of the hunt. She was also believed to be a virgin and protector of young children. Anyone in legend who threatened her met a grisly end and her temple was regarded as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

**Cronus**

**Rhea**

## Hera

Known as the goddess of women, family and childbirth, Hera was the sister and wife of Zeus and regarded as the queen of the gods. A firm protector of the sanctity of marriage, Hera was jealous and vengeful of Zeus' affairs with other women and was regarded as a stern matriarchal figure.

**Poseidon**

**Hestia**

## Hades

The brother of Zeus, Hades was believed to reside over the underworld where the souls of the dead traverse after leaving the world. Despite modern misconceptions, Hades was not a devil-like spectre, but rather a passive figure who wished to maintain balance and did so by ensuring all of his subjects (the dead) followed his rules.

## Athena

The goddess of wisdom and war, Athena was particularly worshipped in the city of Athens as a protector. It was believed that Athena would lead warriors into battle and there were numerous temples dedicated to her. An incredibly important goddess to the Greeks, Athena played a role in the Trojan War, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

**Ares**

**Hephaestus**

**Demeter**

# DAWN OF GREEK DEITIES

From the midst of chaos emerged the pantheon of deities and supernatural entities that shaped the ancient Greek perspective on the world

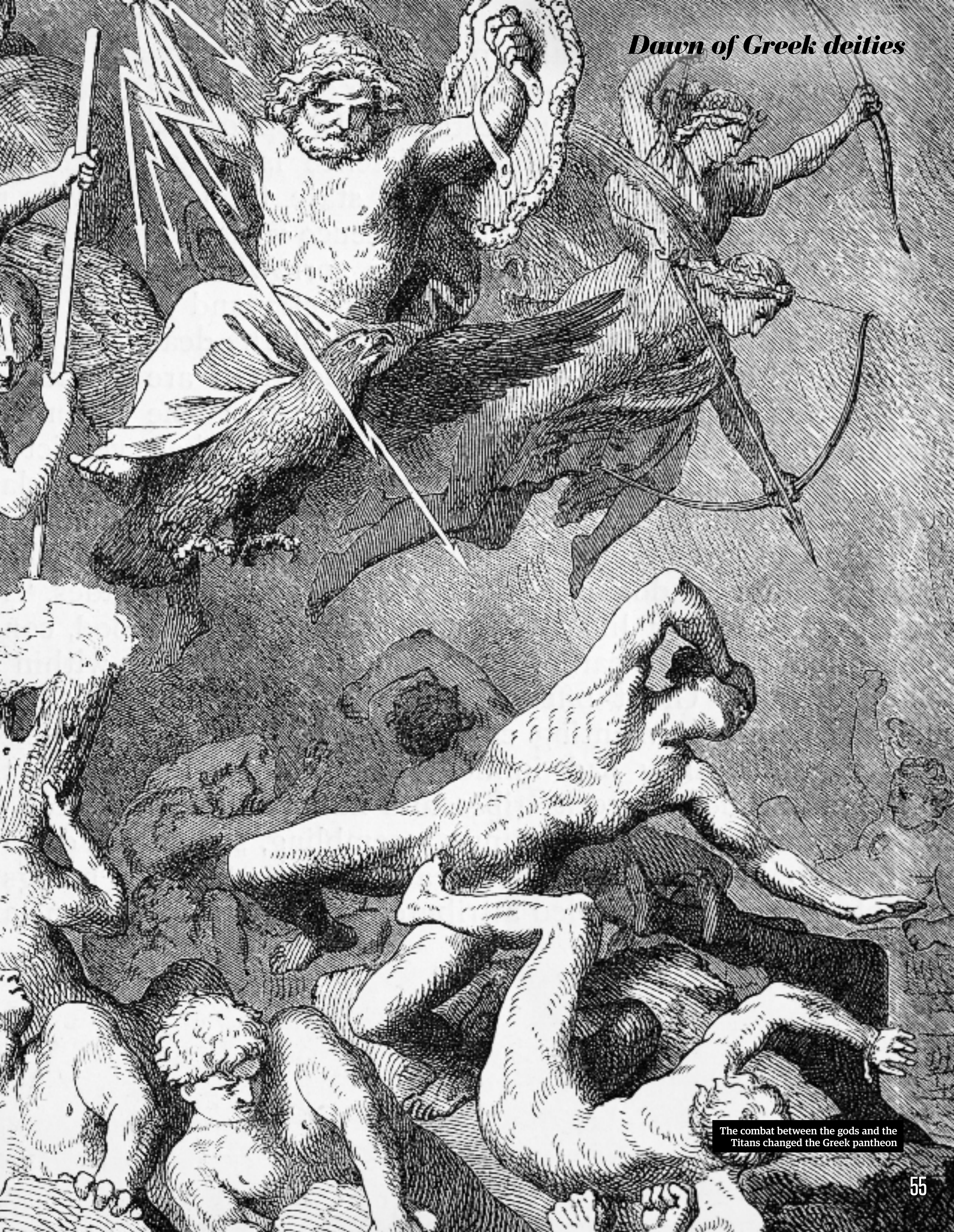
Since its earliest existence, humankind has endeavoured to explain the basic mysteries, circumstances and riddles of the universe. The emergence of myth and legend, the stories of the beginnings of life and being, have all emanated from oral tradition before being repeated, embellished and recorded throughout history.

In the ancient Greek tradition, a pantheon of gods, demigods and fabled creatures has its origins as early as 3300 BCE, and perhaps with contributions from the mysticism of the Near East. Although singular texts may introduce the tenets and major figures of other religions, the origin and development of the Greek gods is recorded in the epic poetry of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the 33 *Homeric Hymns* that pay homage to different gods, and the writings of Hesiod, particularly the Theogony, which recounts the beginning of the world and the ensuing struggles for preeminence. Along with Homer, Hesiod is believed to have established the foundation of Greek religion and worship customs.

All of the Greek gods and goddesses were thought to have control over a different aspect of life

Historians credit Hesiod, who lived about the same time as Homer in the late 8th or early 7th century BCE, as a source of information on economics, farming techniques, astronomy and the keeping of time. However, he is best remembered for writing on the "Birth of the Gods" in the *Theogony*. The epic combines the creation myths that had already been handed down for generations, probably inclusive of Mycenaean, Babylonian and localised traditions. Although some scholars see it as the beginning and foundation for Greek mythology, it may be more accurate to describe the work as a glimpse of the Greek point of view in the known world, a validation of social thought and standards that included the right of a monarch to rule and other societal conditions. The work was probably intended for performance in the tradition of the hymns that have also been associated with poetic competitions and worship events. The lengthy work includes the creation myth, the succession struggle and the genealogy of the gods.

The *Theogony* begins with an archetypal theme. In the earliest times, there was no order. Chaos, or



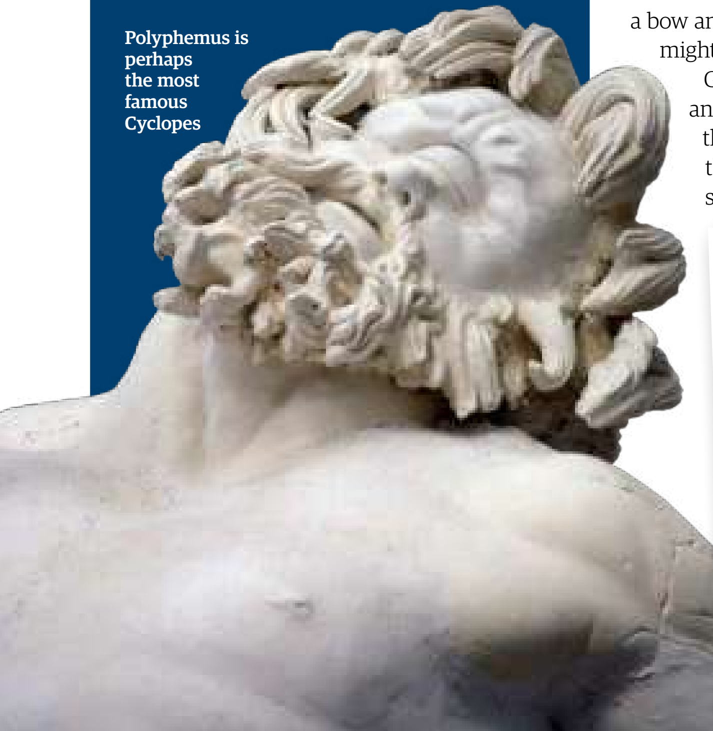
The combat between the gods and the Titans changed the Greek pantheon

Chasm, reigned in the beginning amid darkness and void, an infinite expanse. Then other deities emerged from the realm of nothingness without explanation as to specifically how this primordial event occurred, although some early interpretations allude to the formation of an egg within the realm of Chaos, from which the earliest gods emerged. Chaos was evidently a physical place according to the text, but it was ethereal, gloomy and distant, the first of the primordial beings. To others, it was simply “air”. The idea of infinity was familiar to the Greeks of the ancient world, and their existence, they believed, emanated from original or basic unity, the permanent basis of all things. This was known as apeiron, which translates into English as ‘the unlimited’.

## Brothers of the Titans

Hesiod describes the Cyclopes, the first children of Uranus and Gaia, as a trio of giants with a single eye in the middle of their foreheads. Possessing tremendous strength, they have been depicted historically as craftsmen, builders or blacksmiths, working as masons or pounding iron at their forges. The three Cyclopes described in the *Theogony* include Brontes, the Thunderer, Steropes, Lightning, and Arges. These imposing beings, supposedly with harsh dispositions, were brothers of the Hecatonchieres and the Titans. Because Uranus feared their strength, he imprisoned them. Cronus freed them temporarily but then placed them back in Tartarus, later to be freed by Zeus.

The word ‘Cyclops’ translates literally as ‘circle-eyed’, and Homer calls them sons of the god Poseidon, particularly describing the man-eating Polyphemus of his epic the *Odyssey*. Hesiod, however, names only the three Cyclopes and stresses their contributions to the achievements of others, such as providing the thunderbolts of Zeus and perhaps the trident that has come to symbolise Poseidon, the helmet of invisibility used by Hades and other gods, and the bows and arrows of moonlight and sun rays given to Artemis and Apollo.



**Polyphemus is perhaps the most famous Cyclopes**

Some Greek philosophers described Chaos as the foundation of reality. In the 5th century BCE, the philosopher Xenophanes wrote, “The upper limit of the earth borders on air, near our feet. The lower limit reaches down to the apeiron. The sources and limits of the earth, the sea, the sky… and all things are located in a great windy-gap, which seems to be infinite, and is a later specification of Chaos.” The struggle between chaos and order is a well-known cross-cultural theme.

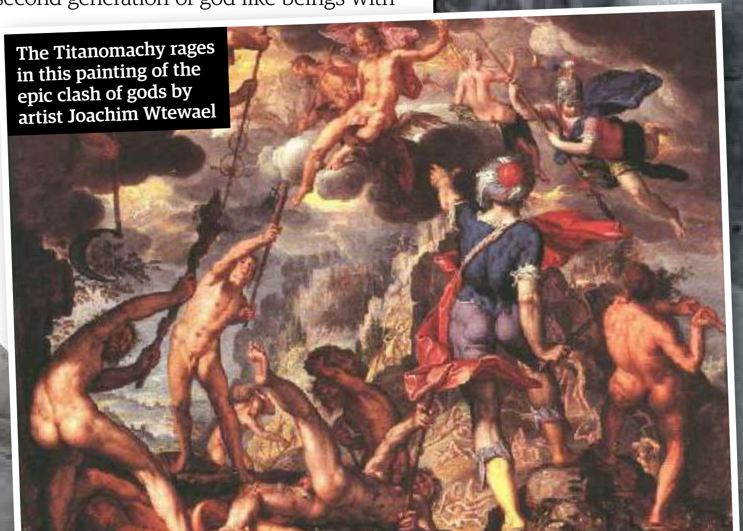
Out of the major Greek gods, Zeus is the only one whose Indo-European origin is undisputed

### BIRTH OF THE GODS

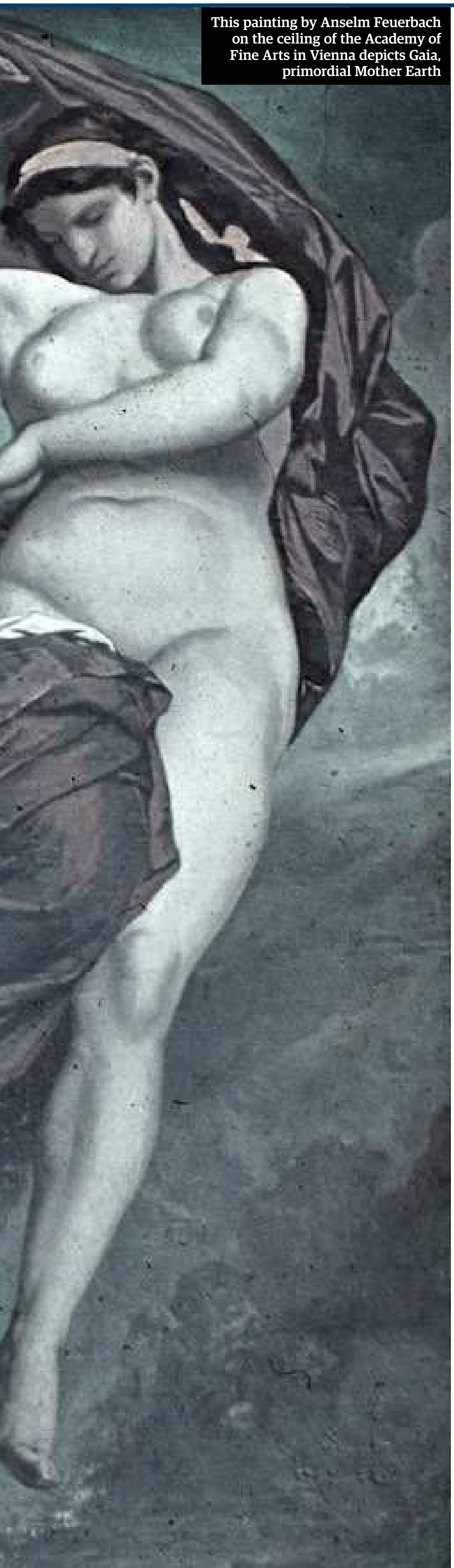
Gaia, or Mother Earth, was the first born of Chaos, and then followed Tartarus, the Underworld or Abyss, Erebus, the darkness that shrouds the Underworld, Nyx, the darkness that covers the earth, and Eros, the god of love and attraction.

Tartarus was a deep, hellish place, and Hesiod goes to great lengths in the *Theogony* to explain its incredible depth. He relates that a bronze anvil falling from heaven would reach the earth nine days later. That anvil would require another nine days to fall from earth to Tartarus. Nyx was the embodiment of the night depicted in Greek art as a winged goddess or charioteer with a shroud of dark, shadowy mist above her head. Erebus was known as the primordial god of darkness and a close associate of Nyx. With the onset of evening, Nyx was said to have drawn the darkness of Erebus across the sky, filling every void and crevice with it. Then, with each new day, Erebus’ daughters of light would scatter that darkness. Eros, although he was a primordial god, was often depicted as a mischievous child of Aphrodite, the goddess of love, and was responsible for bringing love to both the gods and mortals. He is often depicted as a handsome young man or even as a child, with a bow and arrow or bearing gifts that one lover might give to another.

Gaia then gave birth to Uranus, the sky, and to Pontus, the sea. Gaia and Uranus then became a couple, and through their union were born the 12 Titans, a second generation of god-like beings with



**The Titanomachy rages in this painting of the epic clash of gods by artist Joachim Wtewael**



This painting by Anselm Feuerbach on the ceiling of the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna depicts Gaia, primordial Mother Earth

incredible strength and the ability to take the form of other beings such as animals or elements of nature, along with the three monolithic Cyclopes who were born with one large eye in the centre of their foreheads, and the Hecatonchieres, three horrific monsters with 100 arms and 50 heads each. Meanwhile, Erebus and Nyx came together, and their offspring were Ether, the heavenly light, and Day, the earthly light. Nyx later became the mother of Doom, Fate, Death, Sleep, Dreams, Nemesis and a host of other beings, such as Labour, Misery and Deception.

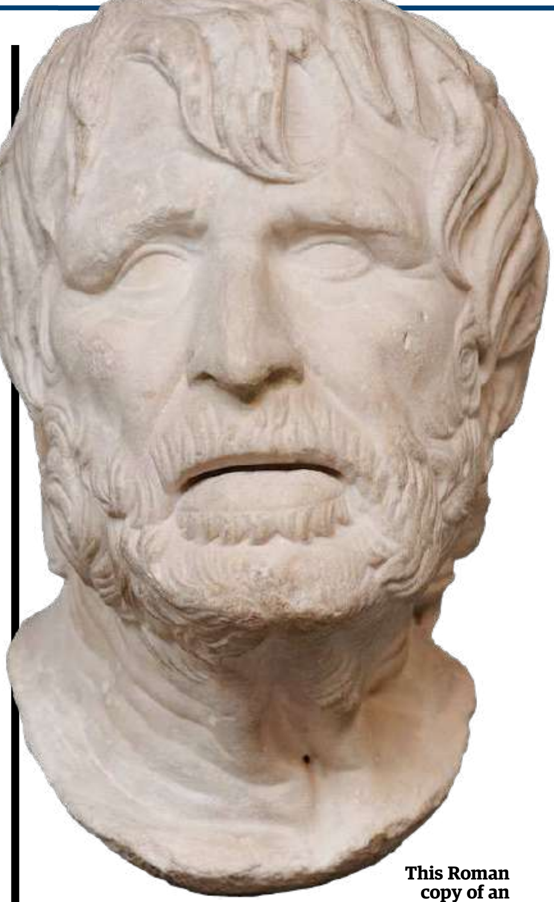
Uranus became the ruler of the universe, and the ancient Greeks saw that universe as a brass dome sprinkled generously with stars. Along with Gaia, who was both his mother and his wife, Uranus fathered the beings that would soon enough prove his undoing.

The children of Gaia and Uranus were forced to take sides in the love-hate relationship that developed between their parents. Uranus was a terrible father and unsympathetic husband. He was filled with hate for the Hecatinchieres, whose hatred for their father was equally as passionate. As Gaia attempted to give birth to the Hecatonchieres, Uranus, who was repulsed by the sight of these monstrous beings, pushed each one back into their mother's womb and imprisoned them inside. The experience was dreadfully painful for Gaia, and she sought revenge against her husband, asking her children, the Titans and the Cyclopes, for help in accomplishing the task.

The children feared their father, but Cronus, the last-born of the 12 Titans, found the courage to oppose Uranus. One evening when his father approached Gaia's bed to lie with her, Cronus was quietly waiting. His mother had fashioned a sharp sickle of flint and given it to him to strike at an opportune moment. In a flash, Cronus castrated his father, who writhed in agony. While the Theogony asserts that Cronus acted alone, other versions of the creation myth include four of his Titan brothers as accomplices, who held Uranus in place as Cronus slashed their father. As blood dripped from Uranus' wound, the Ash Tree Nymphs, or Meliae, were created. The Honey Nymphs, who probably belong to this group, would later assume the important role of raising Zeus on the island of Crete.

The blood of Uranus also gave rise to the Giants, a race of incredibly strong beings, although they were not necessarily great in stature, who would one day do battle with the gods of Olympus. The Furies, or Erinyes, also sprang from the wound. These deities of the underworld included Allecto, Unceasing in Anger, Tisiphone, Avenger of Murder,

> "The children feared their father, but Cronus, the last-born of the 12 Titans, found the courage to oppose Uranus"



**This Roman copy of an original Greek work is believed by many scholars to be an image of Hesiod**

## Who was Hesiod?

Along with his famous contemporary Homer, the poet and author Hesiod played a significant role in establishing the religious customs and beliefs of ancient Greek society, and in turn the genesis of Western culture. Historians debate his actual dates of birth and death but place his writings sometime around 750 to 650 BCE. Hesiod contributed the major work, the *Theogony*, along with instructional poems such as *Works and Days*, a farmer's almanac and depiction of peasant life. He contributed to economic theory, the keeping of time and astronomy. Hesiod is also remembered as the first poet and author in the Western tradition to place himself in his work with an active voice.

Hesiod is believed to have been a native of Boetia in central Greece and he was a descendant of a family that had emigrated from Asia Minor. He began his poetic career after being visited by the Muses while tending sheep and attributed his poetic ability to their gift of a "poet's staff", bestowed on him with the commission to "sing of the race of the blessed gods immortal".

Hesiod is further believed to have achieved some degree of fame during his lifetime, as evidenced by his invitations to participate in major ceremonies and funerary events.

and Megaera, Jealousy, who came to earth to pursue criminals and judge their wickedness.

Cronus took up his father's severed testicles and threw them into the sea in a rage. From the midst of the foam rose the beautiful figure of Aphrodite, the goddess of love. She moved along the surface of the waters and stepped ashore on the island of Cyprus in the eastern Mediterranean Sea, which subsequently became sacred to her worship.

After his unfortunate mutilation, the fate of Uranus is actually unknown. He either died or withdrew from prominence for all eternity. However, before his departure Uranus prophesied that Cronus and the rest of the Titans would be punished for plotting against their father.

## CRONUS AND THE TITANS

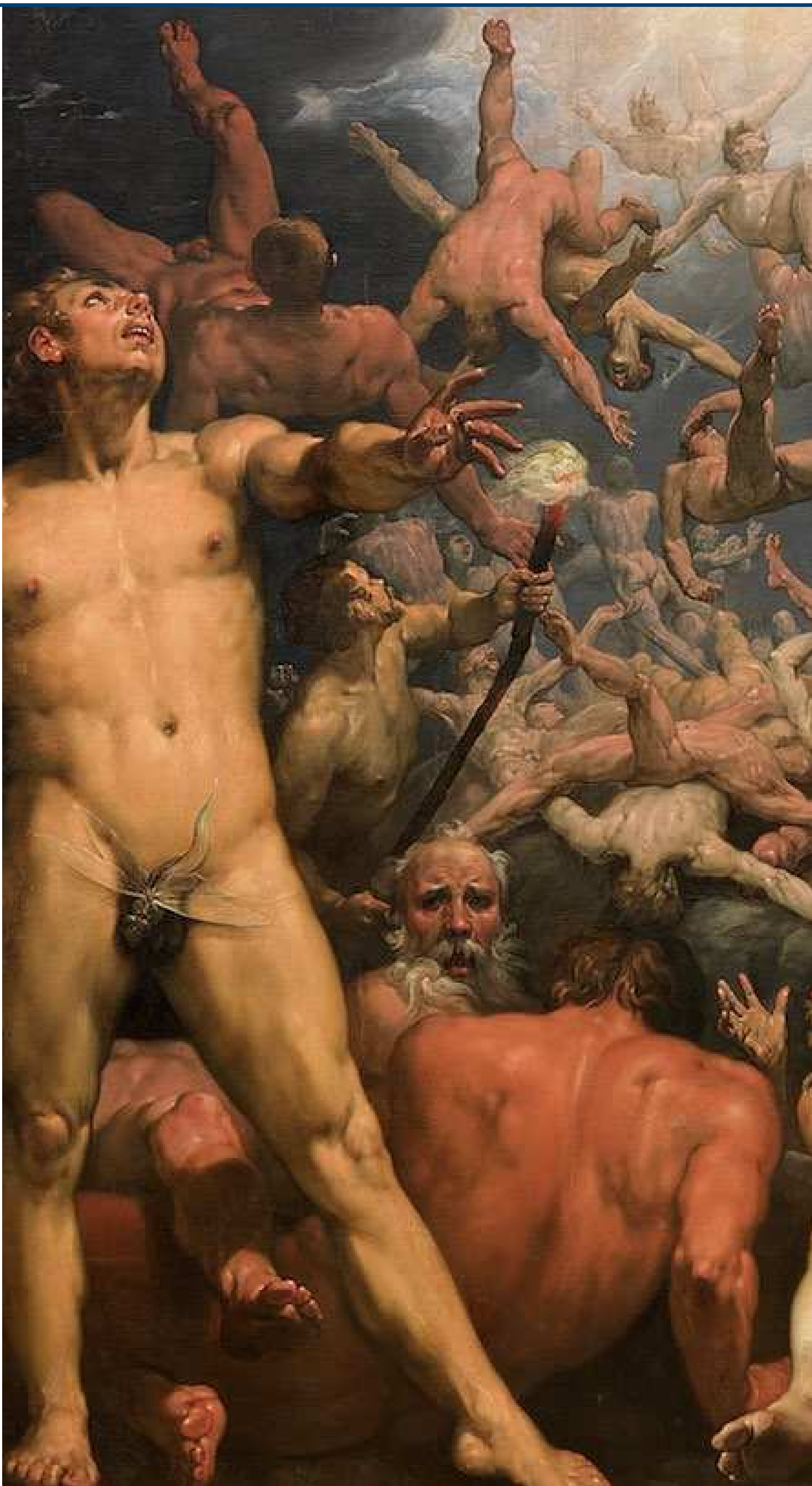
Cronus banished the Hecatonchieres and Cyclopes to Tartarus and took control of creation. Although he was the youngest of the Titans, he proved the strongest. He was considered the god of time as well, particularly when time was perceived as a destructive and debilitating influence. Cronus' Titan siblings included six sisters and five brothers.

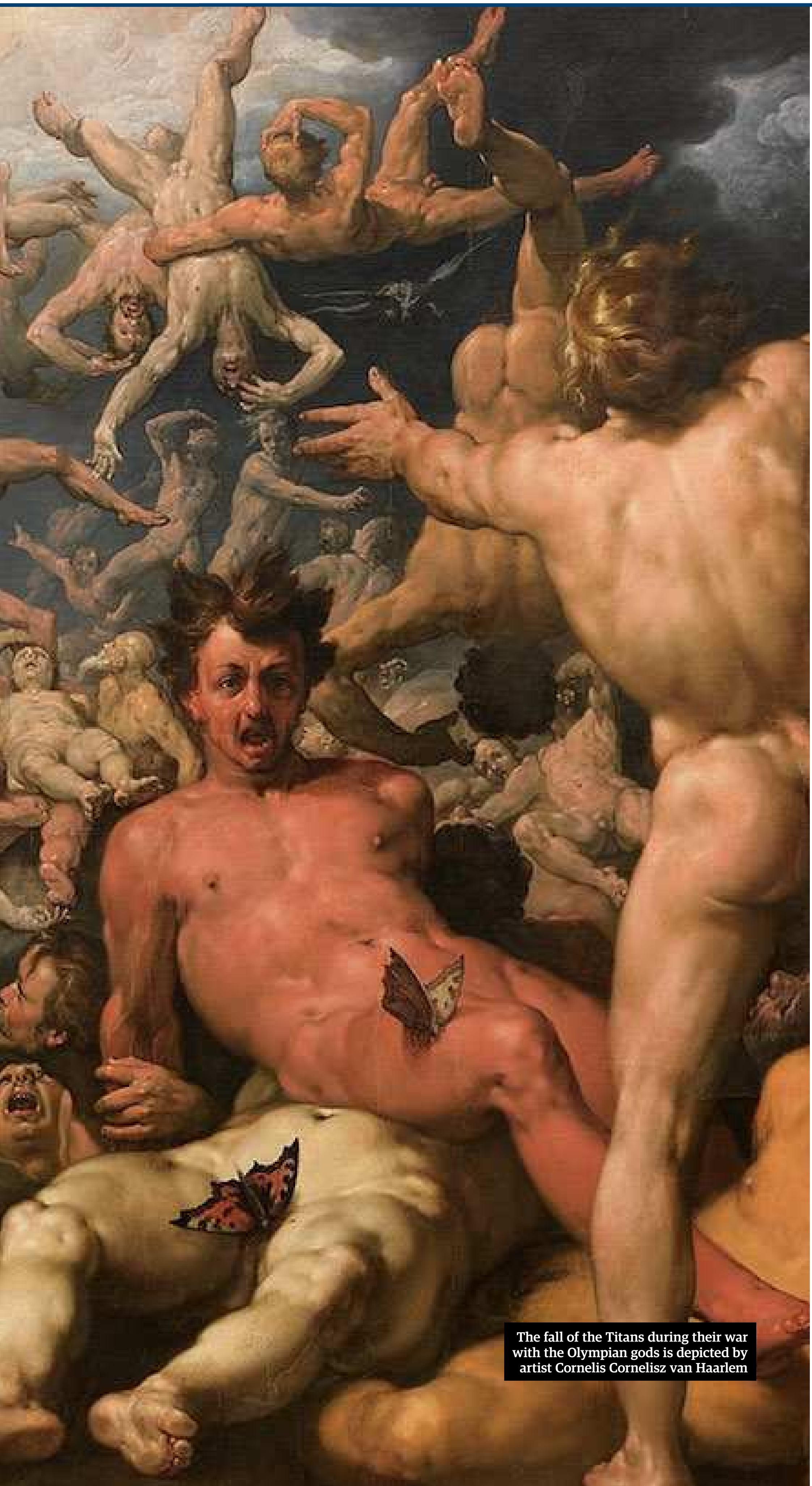
Oceanus was the god of the seas, including the River Okeanos, the source of all the Earth's fresh water, springs, streams and rain clouds. The eldest of the Titans, he also ruled the planets and other heavenly bodies that rose from and set into his waters. He was paired with his sister Tethys, and together they produced the Potamoi, gods of the rivers, the Okeanides, nymphs of fountains and springs, and the Nephelai, or clouds. In some versions of the creation story, Oceanus is depicted as declining to take part with his brothers in the castration of Uranus. He was usually depicted in Greek mythology with large bull horns and the tail of a fish.

Hyperion was the god of the Sun, or heavenly light. He was the father of Helios the Sun, Eos the Dawn, and Selene the Moon. The spouse of his sister, Theia, the lady or keeper of the blue sky, his name meant 'he who goes above'. In some versions of the creation story, Hyperion is one of four brothers who served as pillars to hold the four corners of Heaven and Earth apart. Since the Sun rises in the east, Hyperion would have served as the easternmost pillar. He developed the cyclical days and months that conform to the movement of the celestial bodies and the changes of seasons.

Coeus was later known to the Romans as Polos, translating as 'of the northern pole', and suggesting the he may have held the northernmost pillar that

> "Cronus took up his father's severed testicles and threw them into the sea"





The fall of the Titans during their war with the Olympian gods is depicted by artist Cornelis Cornelisz van Haarlem

separated earth and sky. Coeus, according to his Greek interpretation, may have served as the axis of the heavens around which other celestial bodies and constellations revolved, although he seems to have played a minor role in their early pantheon. He was also the god of heavenly oracles and may have been associated with intellect or inquisitive minds, said to have prophetic powers and to have had a telepathic link to old Uranus.

Crius is thought to have held the southernmost pillar separating Earth and the sky. He is represented by the ram, the constellation Aries, which rises in the south and signals the beginning of the ancient Greek new year. Paired with Eurybia – an offspring of the sea – his son, Astraios, was the god of the stars.

Iapetus served as the pillar of the west separating Earth and the sky. His name translates as 'the piercer', possibly with a spear, which appears to be a reference to mortality or the human life span. Iapetus was also possibly designated as the god of craftsmanship. His sons played significant roles in the creation of humankind and other earthly creatures. Prometheus, the bringer of fire, was clever and imparted scheming to humans, while Epimetheus was without common sense and bequeathed stupidity to the human race. Atlas, destined to carry creation on his powerful shoulders, was also patient and daring, additional qualities that humans have embraced. Menoetius was arrogant and violent, two pronounced weaknesses of human existence.

Themis was the Titan goddess of divine law and order and the rules of conduct. She governed the oracles and was the second Oracle of Delphi. As the voice of the oracles, she instructed mankind in the earliest interpretations of right and wrong, justice and civil authority. She influenced religious and societal practices with the introduction of offerings to the gods, the qualities of hospitality and piety, and basic morality. She later became a bride of Zeus and was often depicted seated beside his throne, advising him on legal and moralistic matters.

Phoebe was the Titan goddess of brightness and radiance who possessed the gift of prophecy and was also a prophet and the third Oracle of Delphi. Phoebe was paired with her brother Coeus, and their union produced two daughters – Leto, who later became a lover of Zeus and mother of twins Apollo and Artemis, and Asteria, the 'starry one'. Phoebe apparently did not choose to participate in the castration of Uranus and was possibly spared the banishment to Tartarus. Phoebe later bestowed her role as Oracle of Delphi to her grandson, Apollo.

Theia, the goddess of heavenly light and of sight, was said to have given gold and silver their luster. Paired with Hyperion, she was the mother of Helios, Eos and Selene.

Tethys, the wife of Oceanus, was the goddess of fresh water and the mother of the Nephelai, Potamoi and Okeanides. Her name comes from the Greek for 'nurse' or 'grandmother', and she is often a nondescript figure in Greek art but is accompanied by the goddess of childbirth, Eileithyia. She gave birth to many water nymphs and river gods and was thought to have the power to manipulate water through subterranean channels that nourished and sustained her offspring.

Mnemosyne was the inventor of languages and words as well as being the Titan goddess of time, memory and remembrance. She was the mother of the Muses and represented the memorisation required to pass traditional oral histories down through generations to preserve the story of the gods and their ascendancy. She was credited with inventing writing and speech. She was a "minor" oracle and may have been considered as a precursor to the nine daughters of Zeus, who were the goddesses of music.

Rhea married her brother Cronus. As the mother figure of the gods, she was goddess of female fertility, all motherhood and generation. Her name translates as 'flow' or 'ease', perhaps referring to the birth process. She also represented the advance of time and events. As the queen of heaven, she bore the children of Cronus, who remembered the warning his father, Uranus, and later his mother, Gaia, had issued.

Cronus could not allow his many children to survive to threaten his reign. As each of his children was born, Cronus proceeded to swallow them. The first five, Hestia, Demeter, Hera, Hades and Poseidon, were each consumed at birth. Rhea was disturbed by her husband's conduct and bore her sixth child, Zeus, in secret inside a cave within Mount Ida on the island of Crete, possibly with the help of her mother and father, Uranus and Gaia. Rhea brought to Cronus a stone wrapped in baby clothing and he promptly swallowed it without attempting to look at the child's face. Meanwhile, Zeus grew to maturity on Crete.

## SON VERSUS FATHER

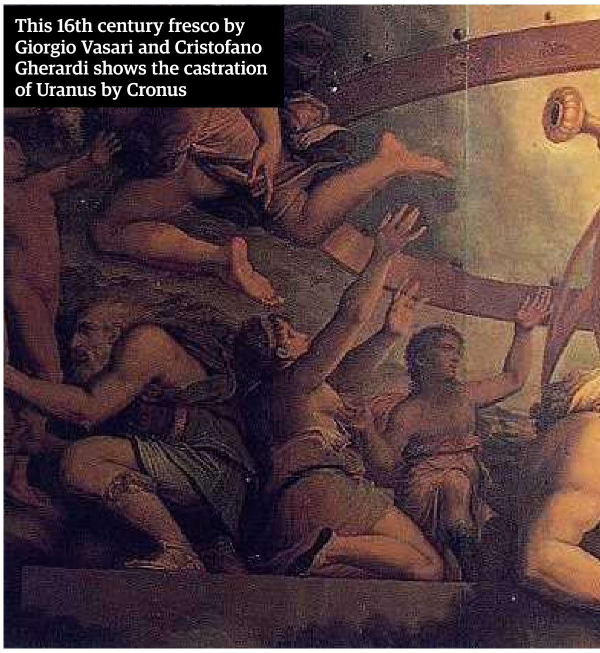
Nurtured by nymphs, Zeus was cared for primarily by Amalthea, the tender goddess and foster mother who is often depicted as a goat or a goat-tending nymph. Nursed on the milk of Amalthea, Zeus grew strong. His cries were muffled by the Curetes, minor gods who danced and clanged their spears and shields so that Cronus would not be alarmed by the noise of a baby.

Meanwhile, Cronus grew old. Continuing the theme of conflict between father and son, Zeus considered schemes to overthrow Cronus. He conspired with the Oceanid Metis, a daughter of Oceanus and Tethys. The name Metis was originally translated as 'magical cunning' or 'wise counsel', and Metis provided Zeus with a potion that would cause Cronus to vomit forth his children, Zeus' brothers and sisters, along with the stone that he had been deceived into swallowing. The plan succeeded and shortly after quaffing the elixir, Cronus regurgitated all of his children.

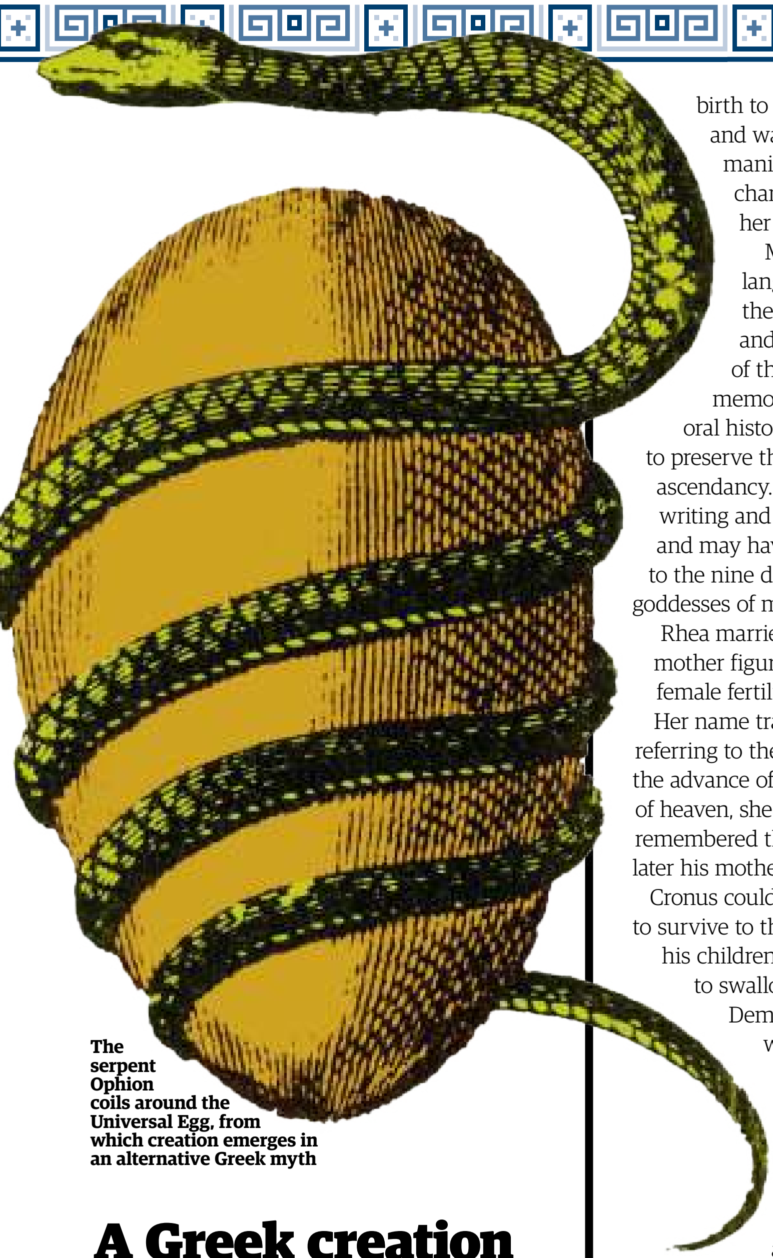
The first of the contents of Cronus' stomach to come out was the stone, and he immediately knew that he had been deceived – just as his evil father had prophesied. Then came the five Olympian deities that were destined to rule on Mount Olympus with their brother Zeus. These were Hera, goddess of marriage, Poseidon, god of the sea, Hades, god of the underworld, Hestia, goddess of the hearth, and Demeter, goddess of crops and the harvest.

A violent and bloody war between the gods, father Cronus and son Zeus, ensued. With the help of his brothers and sisters and of the Cyclopes and Hecatonchieres, Zeus succeeded in dethroning Cronus. The former king of the gods was banished to Tartarus along with rest of the Titans. Zeus raised a stone at Parnassus to memorialise his victory over his father. One myth recounts that Zeus released two eagles at opposite ends of the world, charging them to come together in the centre of planet. The two birds met at Delphi, and Zeus placed the stone at the base of Parnassus as a sign to humankind. The monument was named the Omphalos Stone, the navel of the world. From that point, all life on Earth was said to have emanated and it was there that an oracle was later placed.

> As well as slaying the dragon Python, it was also said that Apollo's supreme wisdom was beyond human rationality



This 16th century fresco by Giorgio Vasari and Cristofano Gherardi shows the castration of Uranus by Cronus

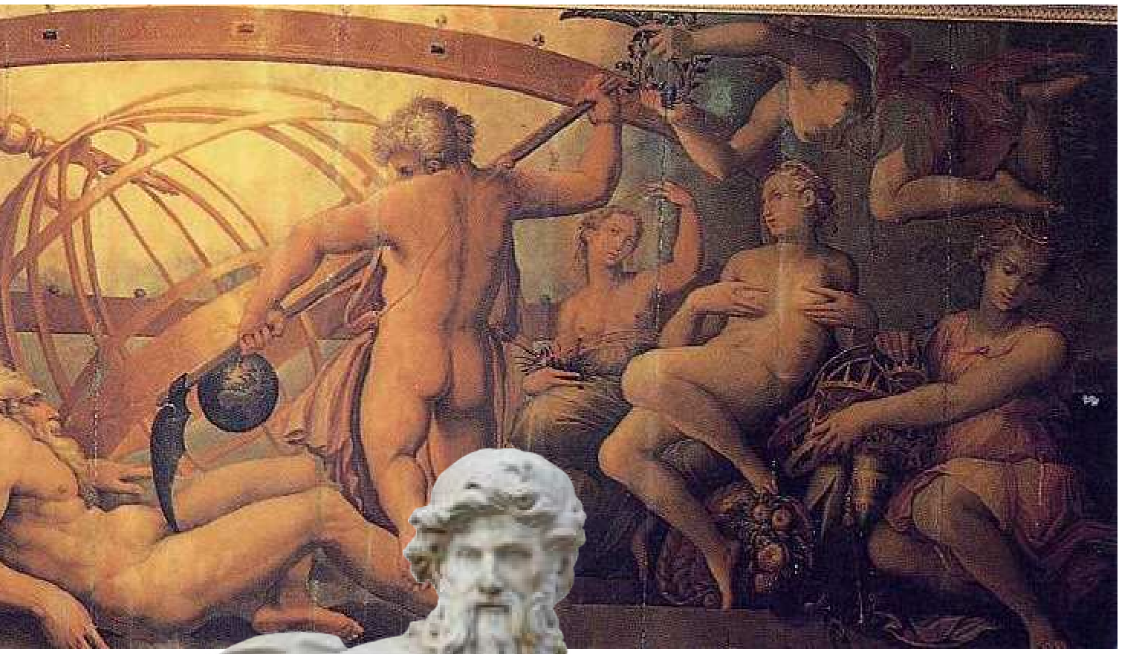


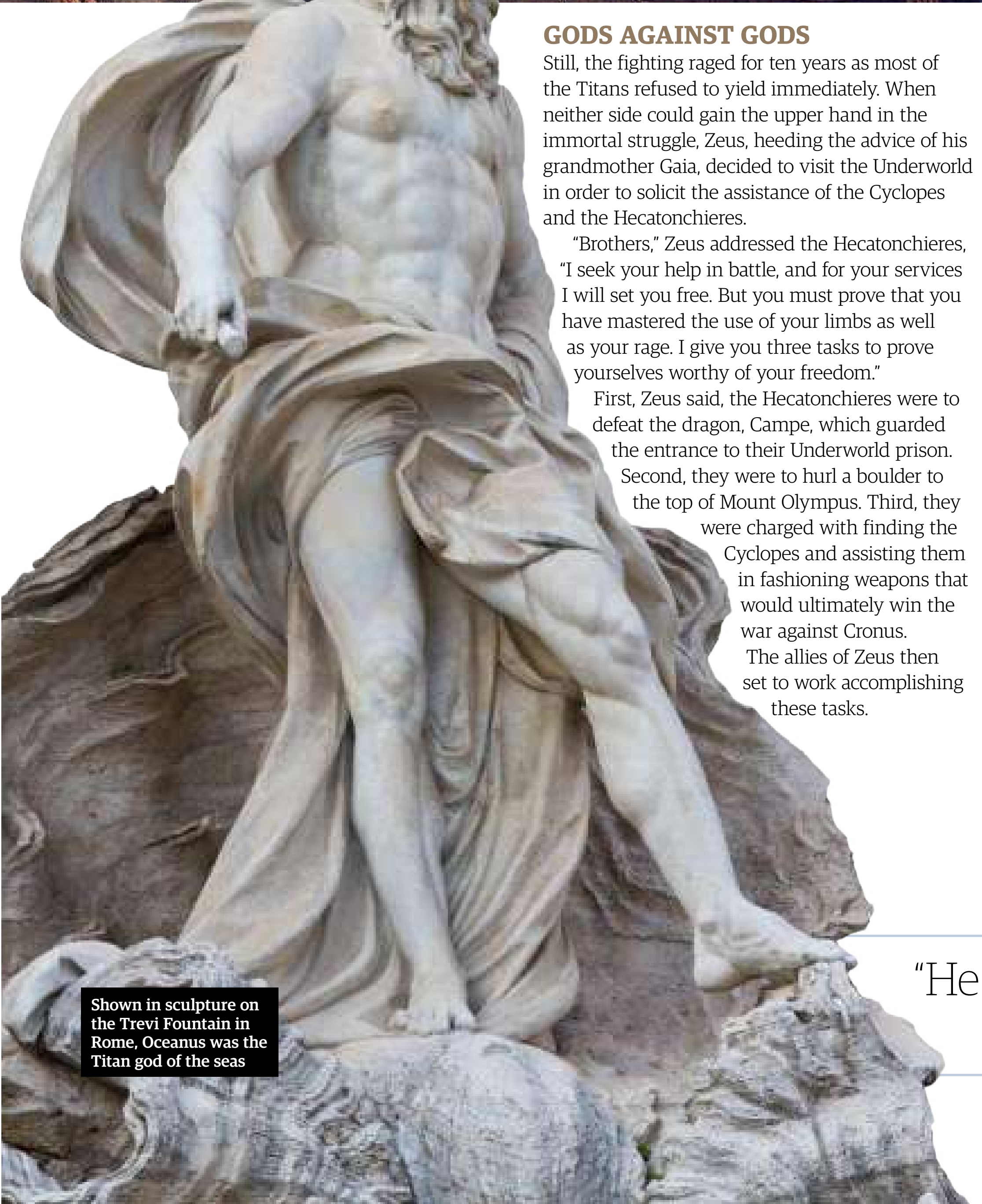
**The serpent Ophion coils around the Universal Egg, from which creation emerges in an alternative Greek myth**

## A Greek creation alternative

In contrast to Hesiod's version of creation, another, attributed to Pelasgian civilisation, or the forerunners of the Greeks themselves, credits creation to Eurynome, the goddess of all things. According to this story, Eurynome is born of Chaos and then separates the waters from the sky. She dances naked across the waters, quickening her pace, catching the wind in her hands, and rubbing it into the form of a serpent called Ophion. As the snake watches the goddess dance, he becomes attracted to her and coils himself around her body seven times.

During their embrace, Ophion and Eurynome conceive the Universal Egg. Eurynome instructs Ophion to coil around the egg seven times, and when it hatches, the Earth and all its creation emerge. Then, Eurynome ascends to the summit of Mount Olympus to watch the creation mature. Ophion joins her there, but he begins to boast that he alone is responsible for creation. For this affront, Eurynome tosses the snake from Olympus. She then creates the moon and planets, placing Titan gods and goddesses in dominion over each of them. Cronus and Rhea, for example, are given the planet Saturn and imbued with the power of peace, ironic when considered in the context of Hesiod's violent creation story.





Shown in sculpture on the Trevi Fountain in Rome, Oceanus was the Titan god of the seas

## GODS AGAINST GODS

Still, the fighting raged for ten years as most of the Titans refused to yield immediately. When neither side could gain the upper hand in the immortal struggle, Zeus, heeding the advice of his grandmother Gaia, decided to visit the Underworld in order to solicit the assistance of the Cyclopes and the Hecatonchieres.

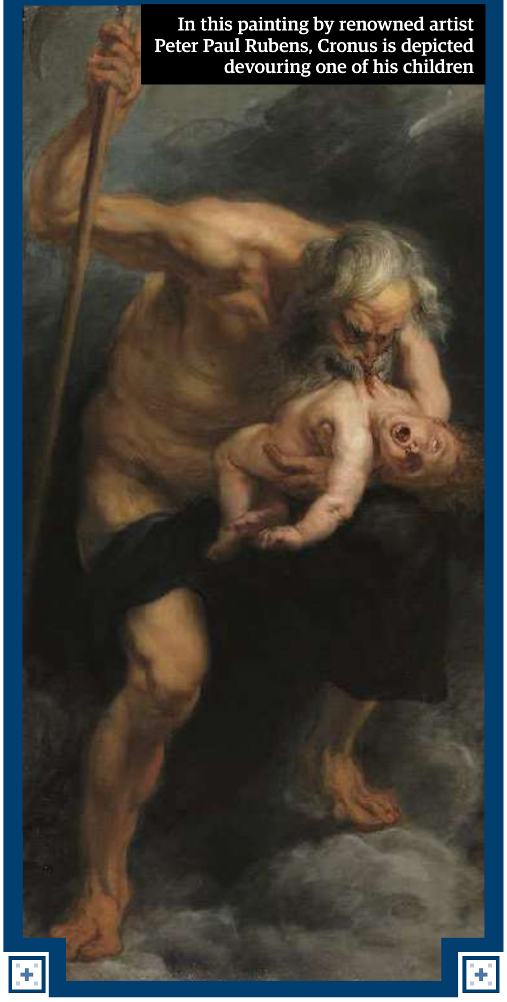
"Brothers," Zeus addressed the Hecatonchieres, "I seek your help in battle, and for your services I will set you free. But you must prove that you have mastered the use of your limbs as well as your rage. I give you three tasks to prove yourselves worthy of your freedom."

First, Zeus said, the Hecatonchieres were to defeat the dragon, Campe, which guarded the entrance to their Underworld prison. Second, they were to hurl a boulder to the top of Mount Olympus. Third, they were charged with finding the Cyclopes and assisting them in fashioning weapons that would ultimately win the war against Cronus.

The allies of Zeus then set to work accomplishing these tasks.

## Usurpation born of envy

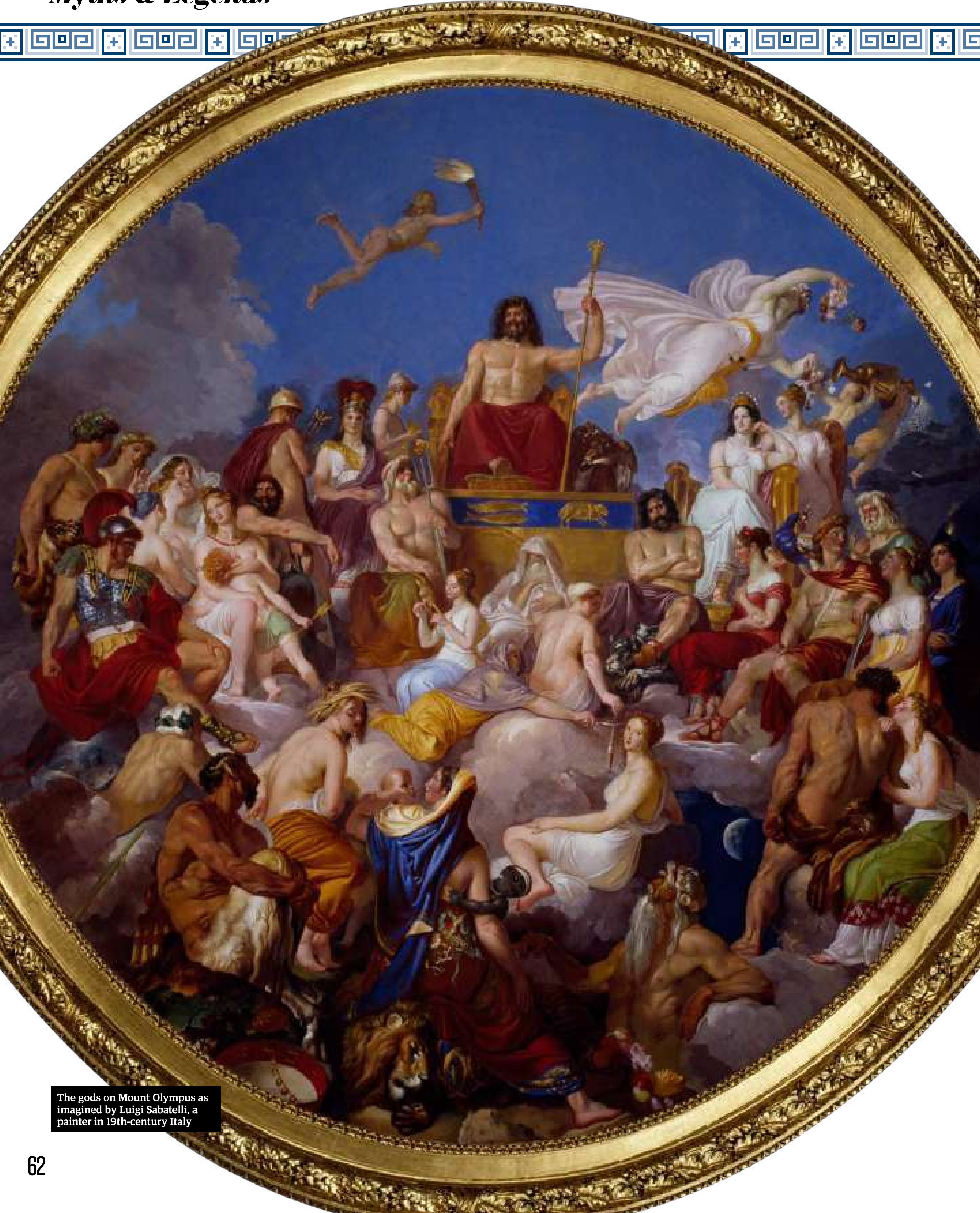
Some interpretations of the rise of Cronus to the throne of the gods add another dimension to his motivation besides simply that of obliging his mother, Gaia, who was tired of bearing children in great pain only to have her husband, Uranus, imprison them in her womb. Cronus, it seems, may also have been motivated by envy, one of the oldest corruptions of the human experience. His own desire for ultimate power may have exerted just as much influence on his decision to mutilate Uranus as Gaia's request for assistance. In castrating his father, Cronus, ironically also known as the god of fertility, achieved his goal of taking power but failed to fulfil Gaia's ultimate motivation for enlisting her son's aid. Rather than freeing the Hecatonchieres and Cyclopes, he imprisoned them. These interpretations add that Gaia, along with Uranus, predicted that Cronos would one day be overthrown by his own children. Envy, thus, led to Cronus devouring his own offspring, Rhea's deception, and his eventual downfall at the hands of Zeus.



In this painting by renowned artist Peter Paul Rubens, Cronus is depicted devouring one of his children

> "He immediately knew that he had been deceived"

© Alamy, Getty Images



The gods on Mount Olympus as imagined by Luigi Sabatelli, a painter in 19th-century Italy

# OLYMPUS HOME OF THE GODS

Zeus and other Olympian gods resided in splendour on Mount Olympus and surveyed the events on Earth far below

For the ancient Greeks, the realm of the Olympian gods and their own terrestrial existence met at the foot of Mount Olympus in northern Greece on the border between Macedonia and Thessaly. The highest mountain in Greece, rising 2,918 metres above sea level, Olympus is as imposing today as it was millennia ago, and viewing the peaks of its massif, sometimes shrouded in clouds, offers the modern individual a perspective on the ancient world.

Mount Olympus first comes to prominence in Greek mythology as Zeus wages war against his father Cronus and the Titans for supremacy over the heavens and the earth. The ten-year struggle culminates in a victory for Zeus, but accounts vary as to the role of the mountain - either Zeus uses Olympus as a base for his battles, or it becomes the home of the gods once victory is won. Known as the Titanomachy, the war was supposedly fought in Thessaly as the Titans, the older generation of gods, used Mount Othrys in southern Greece as their fortress.

## WAR OF THE GODS

In the midst of the struggle for control of the universe, Zeus freed the Hecatonchieres and the Cyclopes from their confinement in Tartarus, enlisting their aid in the conflict. The Hecatonchieres hurled large boulders at the Titans, while the Cyclopes fashioned the powerful lightning bolts and thunder that Zeus used against his father.

While the majority of the Titans supported Cronus, some accounts of the Titanomachy state that Themis, the Titan goddess of order, fairness, and natural law, and her son Prometheus supported the Olympians. Others assert that Prometheus stayed out of the fray, remaining in the victors' good graces temporarily. Assisting Zeus were his brothers and sisters. Hera, Hades, Poseidon, Hestia, and Demeter each contributed to the Olympian victory.

At the end of the Titanomachy, the Titans were imprisoned in Tartarus, and the Hecatonchieres were placed as guards to prevent their escape. One of the most famous Titans to endure eternal punishment was Atlas, condemned to hold the heavens upon his shoulders. Years later,

> The isolated Mount Olympus was the perfect places for the Gods to oversee the world in which the mortals dwelled

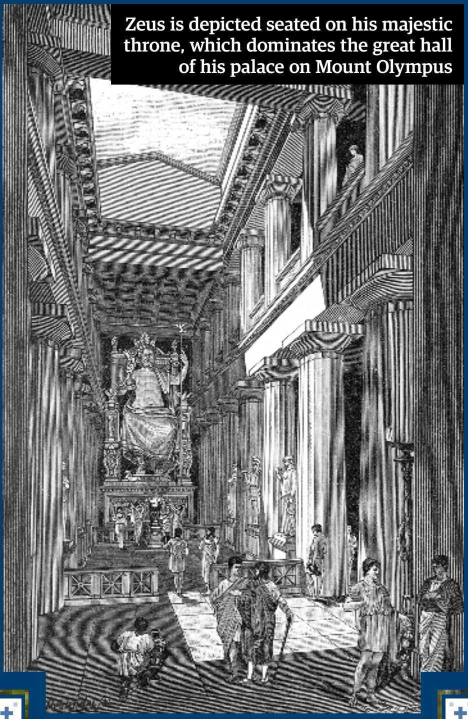
The great Jupiter Smyrna statue depicts the king of the gods in a Roman rendering of the classic Greek god Zeus

## The throne of Zeus

In 1955, British poet Robert Graves published a two-volume compendium of Greek mythology, *The Greek Myths*. The work has been praised and criticised as it is possibly more of Graves' own interpretation of the ancient works than actual analysis of existing historical documentation. However, Graves does provide a vivid description of the thrones of Zeus and other principal Olympian gods that is, if nothing else, entertaining.

According to Graves, the throne of Zeus sat at the end of the large gathering hall in his palace. Seven steps of different colours led up to the throne, fashioned by Hephaestus in Egyptian black marble embellished with gold. On its right arm was a golden eagle, the symbol of Zeus, with inset rubies for eyes. Strips of tin emanated from the eagle's mouth, symbolising his powerful lightning bolts. Draped across the seat of the throne was a purple ram's fleece that the god used to make rain. Above the throne stretched a bright blue canopy that mirrored the beauty of the sky.

Hera's throne was beside that of Zeus. It was reached by three crystal steps and made of ivory decorated with golden cuckoos. The full moon soared overhead, while the goddess used a white cowhide to bring rain.



Zeus is depicted seated on his majestic throne, which dominates the great hall of his palace on Mount Olympus

after Zeus' reign was secure, he granted the Titans their freedom and gave his aged father dominion over the Elysian Islands, which the Greeks believed were home to the "blessed dead".

### RISE OF OLYMPUS

For the people of ancient Greece, the Olympian victory signifies the emergence of a new, perhaps more enlightened pantheon of gods that nevertheless appears susceptible to the same foibles that plague humankind. The Olympian gods, thousands of them with specific capabilities, maintain and reinforce the earlier concepts of creation and the existence of beings with powers greater than those of mere mortals. They affirm the notion that the progress of civilisation is achieved through struggle.

As king of the Olympian gods, Zeus established his home on Mount Olympus, and some stories relate that the home existed on the actual summit of the mountain. Others assert that it was high above the peaks of the physical mountain. The entrance to the abode of the Olympian gods was guarded by the Horai, the Seasons, who stood at a pair of golden gates - or gates of clouds - that were fashioned by Hephaestus, blacksmith of the gods. Early writings describe the palace of Zeus as a gleaming acropolis or citadel. Depending on the sources, the principal Olympian gods also resided on Olympus and each had their own palace, constructed of marble and gold with bronze foundations, or they lived communally in the palace of Zeus. The palace or palaces were also the work of Hephaestus, the son of Zeus and Hera, or, as some accounts suggest, the son of Hera alone. Hephaestus was the only Olympian god that was not physically beautiful, but he did perform a valuable service as a craftsman while creating automatons, essentially robots that catered to the needs of the gods.

No mortals were allowed on Mount Olympus - it was the home of the gods and goddesses alone

The 12 principal Olympians residing on Mount Olympus included: Hera, the queen of the gods and goddess of marriage and birth; Poseidon, god of the sea; Athena, goddess of reason, intellect and literature; Apollo, god of light, truth, music and healing; Artemis, twin of Apollo and goddess of the hunt, chastity, virginity and the Moon; Hestia, goddess of the hearth; Demeter, goddess of corn, grain and the harvest; Hermes, winged messenger of the gods; Aphrodite, goddess of love, beauty, fertility and sexual pleasure; Ares, god of war; and Hephaestus, the blacksmith. At the foot of the great mountain, the nine muses, who inspired the progress of music, art, literature and science, resided.

Hades, god of the underworld, did not reside on Olympus. However, his station is related to an alternative account of the aftermath of the defeat of the Titans. It asserts that following the Olympian victory the three brothers, Zeus, Hades, and Poseidon, gathered to discuss the disposition

The majestic peaks of Mount Olympus, mythical home of the Olympian gods, tower above the surrounding countryside in northern Greece of the Heavens, the Earth, and the Underworld. The trio settled their issues by lot, and Zeus became supreme ruler of the sky and the heavens with dominion over all the realms, including the sea, granted to Poseidon, and the abode of the dead, where Hades ruled beneath the earth.

## LIFE ON OLYMPUS

The gods of Olympus socialised, schemed and observed the humans below while feasting on nectar and ambrosia. According to some accounts, the sustenance was delivered by doves, and its fragrant aroma was pleasing while its potency transcended that of ordinary food.

The focal point of Olympus was the palace of Zeus. Its approaches were surrounded by a large courtyard with numerous covered passages. Its immensity allowed the principal gods and their thousands of demi-gods and lesser beings of the immortal to gather when Zeus called a council or a great meeting occurred. A large hall with floor of gold occupied the centre of the palace and served as a gathering place for feasts and debates. From the palace, Zeus allowed the gods to view activities on Earth. On either side of the great hall were living quarters and storage areas.

Zeus supposedly also utilised a second location on Mount Olympus that was high above his palace. Access was reserved for Zeus alone, and from this majestic location, he observed all activity below.

## A PATERNAL PERSPECTIVE

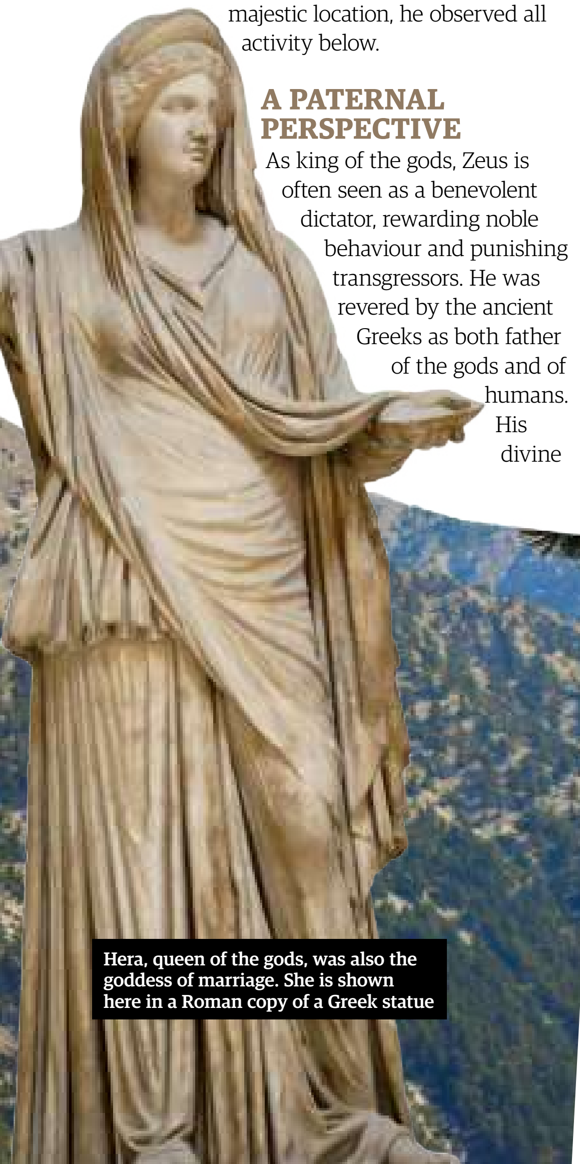
As king of the gods, Zeus is often seen as a benevolent dictator, rewarding noble behaviour and punishing transgressors. He was revered by the ancient Greeks as both father of the gods and of humans. His divine powers included mastery of the weather, and using his shield he created storms, clouds and any phenomena associated with the sky. He regulated the time and the order of the universe and nature. He was also a counsellor for earthly rulers.

While life on Olympus was generally portrayed as idyllic, threats to the serenity and ease of existence arose, requiring Zeus to take forceful action even after he had achieved supremacy. Gaia, Mother Earth, was said to have become enraged at the downfall of her children, the Titans, and sought revenge against Zeus and the Olympian gods.

Typhon was the last child of Gaia and Tartarus, another of the primordial gods. He was depicted as the most powerful monster in creation, a fire-breathing dragon that never slept and menaced enemies with its 100 heads. During their epic battle, Typhon attacked Zeus and tore the tendons from his body. Hermes came to the rescue, healing the embattled Zeus, who then dispatched Typhon with his powerful lightning bolts. Vanquished, Typhon was imprisoned beneath Mount Etna, the violent volcano on the eastern coast of Sicily.

Another threat to the stability of Olympus and to the world emerged with the Giants, or Gigantes, children of Gaia and Uranus who had sprung from the blood of Uranus after his violent castration by Cronus. Among these fearsome creatures were Enceladus, a principal opponent of Athena during the war who was eventually vanquished by Zeus and banished beneath Mount Etna, and the young and powerful Mimas, who threw great boulders and burning trees at the Olympian gods. According to different sources, Mimas was either destroyed by Hephaestus, who hurled great shards of glowing hot metal at the marauding giant, or burned to death by Zeus, whose thunderbolts set him ablaze.

Zeus, who had led the Olympian gods to victory over the Titans, the fierce dragon Typhon and the Giants, was revered as king of the gods and as the example of noble traits and qualities that were admired among mortals. Yet he also displayed human characteristics that caused unrest among the gods and the distrust of Hera, his wife.



Hera, queen of the gods, was also the goddess of marriage. She is shown here in a Roman copy of a Greek statue

English poet and historic novelist Robert Graves offered vivid descriptions of the realm of the gods on Olympus in *The Greek Myths*

## Hestia, hearth and harmony

Hestia is said by many accounts of the Olympian gods to have been the first-born of Cronus and Rhea, and therefore the first to be devoured by her father. One of the original 12 Oympian deities, Hestia was goddess of the hearth and every family hearth or fireplace was her altar. She is perhaps remembered as being a little lower than the other Olympian gods, as she was either not allowed to take part or to play a major role in many of the ceremonial events that took place on Mount Olympus. Her throne was nondescript and unadorned, made of wood.

According to some historians of the gods, Hestia relinquished her place among the 12 supreme Olympians in favour of Dionysus, god of wine, winemaking, fertility and even 'ritual madness'. Dionysus was the son of Zeus and the mortal woman Seleme. Hestia's gesture may well have been to keep peace and harmony on Olympus but some evidence appears that the ancient Greeks themselves were conflicted in their acceptance of this story. In fact, the altar to the Olympians at the agora of Athens includes Hestia, while the frieze on the east wall of the Parthenon depicts Dionysus in the revered place among the 12.

Hestia, Greek goddess of hearth and home, was said to have given up her throne among the 12 gods on Mount Olympus

© Alamy, Getty Images

# THE TWELVE OLYMPIANS

The gods of Olympus were a fractious family of glorious, majestic, scheming and treacherous deities

## ZEUS

### Lord of Olympus

Mighty Zeus was the lord and king of the Olympian gods, and father of many gods and heroes. His domain was the sky and he was master of the weather. His animal was the eagle, the greatest of all birds. Zeus was the most powerful of all the gods - perhaps even stronger than all of them put together - yet he was not invincible, and he could not defy the wishes of his divine brethren with impunity.

Zeus oversaw oaths and hospitality, while his divine radiance was enough to burn mere mortals to ashes. He also had a roving eye and would have many amorous trysts with nymphs and other women who were not his wife. Through Danaë he would father the hero Perseus, slayer of serpent-crowned Medusa; Heracles, destined to become a demigod on Olympus; and Helen, the most beautiful woman of all. Zeus had many other dalliances, and Hera, his wife, would seek vengeance for her humiliation by afflicting them.

## HERMES

### Messenger of the gods

Son of Zeus by the nymph Maia, Hermes was the god of messengers and travellers. He acted to guide others to their destinations. In the *Iliad*, he brings King Priam of Troy through the Greek lines to meet with Achilles to recover the body of his slain son, Hector. When Hera, Athena and Aphrodite needed to find their way to Mount Ida to participate in the Judgment of Paris, it was Hermes who led them to their destination. It was also Hermes who conducted Persephone out of the Underworld and to Demeter in the world of the living.

## POSEIDON

### Lord of the sea

Poseidon was the full brother of Zeus and son of Cronus. When the three brothers, Zeus, Poseidon and Hades, overthrew their father, Poseidon took the sea as his realm. Like the sea, Poseidon could be placid one moment and raging the next, and his weapon and symbol of authority was the three-pronged trident. The vengeful Poseidon ensured that the Greek hero Odysseus would be delayed for years in returning to his home island of Ithaca for his blinding of the sea god's son, the Cyclops. He was responsible for earthquakes, and was known as Earth-shaker among Greeks.

## ATHENA

### Goddess of wisdom and war

Athena, goddess of wisdom, was the daughter of Zeus by the goddess Metis. The bright goddess was the deity of civilisation, as well as a patroness of many Greek heroes. In the *Iliad*, we find her siding with the Greeks against the Trojans during their ten-year war in which she directly intervened to help them. One significant form of assistance comes at the beginning of the *Iliad* where she restrains the warrior Achilles from killing Agamemnon. In the *Odyssey*, we see her helping another favourite, Odysseus, make his way from Troy to Ithaca.

Athena was also the patron deity of Athens, the greatest of all Greek cities. In the 5th century BCE, the Athenians would build the Parthenon, the most magnificent of all temples, dedicated to her.

The goddess was noble in aspect and demeanour, but could be harsh to those who displeased her. Tiresias had the misfortune to espy her while she bathed, and she struck the poor man blind for his transgression.

## DIONYSUS

### God of wine and revelry

Dionysus was the god of wine and vine. The son of Zeus by the mortal woman Semele, worship of him by his devotees was among the most startling of all the Greek gods. Women figured prominently in his cult. The leaders, known as maenads, partook in ecstatic, sometimes violent, rituals in which they engaged in frenzied dancing and tore wild animals to pieces. Greek women would attend his ceremonies by going into the hills to engage in processions led by the maenads. There they would drink themselves to stupefaction in the Bacchanalia celebration.

## HERA

### Queen of the gods

Glorious Hera was both the wife and sister of Zeus, and queen of the gods. Her purview was marriage and motherhood, but despite her position as wife to Zeus, she was hardly the happiest of spouses. Her husband's philandering ways made her extremely jealous and she had a particular hatred for Heracles, Zeus's son by the mortal woman Alcmene. Hera constantly sought to avenge her humiliation by Zeus by afflicting Heracles, who had really done her no harm. She despatched snakes to kill the boy when he was just an infant, but she found her murderous plan thwarted when little Heracles killed them both. She later made him go mad, and while he was insane, he killed his wife and children.

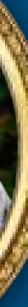
Hera could be murderously jealous of Zeus's lovers themselves, too. She persuaded Semele, the mother of the god Dionysus, to insist that Zeus appear to her in his full divine splendour. Reluctantly, he did so, and the poor woman was reduced to ash by his overpowering radiance.

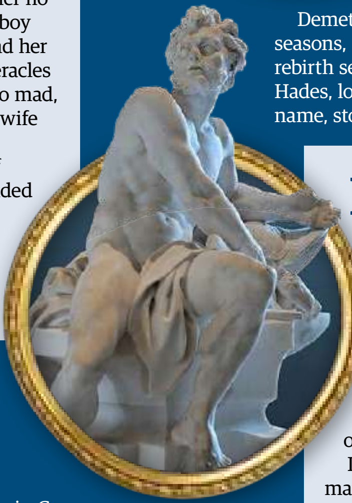
## DEMETER

### The goddess of growing things

The goddess of the earth, motherhood, fertility and the harvest was known as Demeter. As the ultimate source of the grain that the Greeks used to make their bread, she was enormously important to them. Her main festival was the Thesmophoria, held every autumn to ensure a good harvest.

Demeter figures prominently in the explanation for the seasons, and thus the annual cycles of birth, life, death, and rebirth seen in the natural world. The story begins when Hades, lord of the Underworld kingdom that also bore his name, stole the goddess's daughter Persephone.



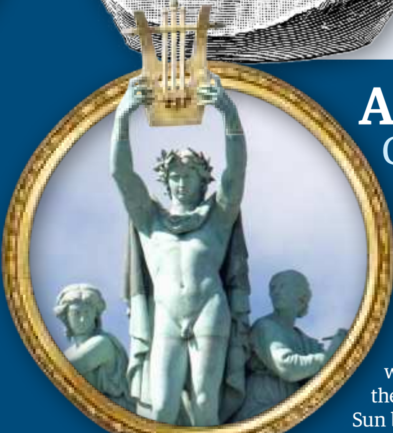


## HEPHAESTUS

### The smith of Olympus

Hephaestus was the great smith of the pantheon. Unlike the other deities, who were physically perfect, Hephaestus was lame, and was thus the epitome of the outsider among the gods. He was cruelly mocked by the other gods for his deformity though they admired the products of his hands as he was the patron of all who worked with metal.

Learning that his faithless wife Aphrodite was making love to Ares, he made a magic net that fell upon them while they were abed. Thus trapped, he summoned the other Olympians to view and mock the adulterous pair.



## APOLLO

### God of music, healing and prophecy

Handsome Apollo had his two main cult centres in Greece at Delphi and on the island of Delos. Delphi was home to his chief oracle and priestess, the Pythia, also known as the Oracle of Delphi. There at his shrine she would receive petitioners seeking to question her about the future.

The weapon of Apollo was the bow. When his priest Chryses was mistreated by the Greeks at Troy, he struck down many of them with plague-carrying arrows. He was also said to pull the Sun behind him in his airborne chariot, and was sometimes given the name Phoebus, meaning 'bright'.

## APHRODITE

### Goddess of love

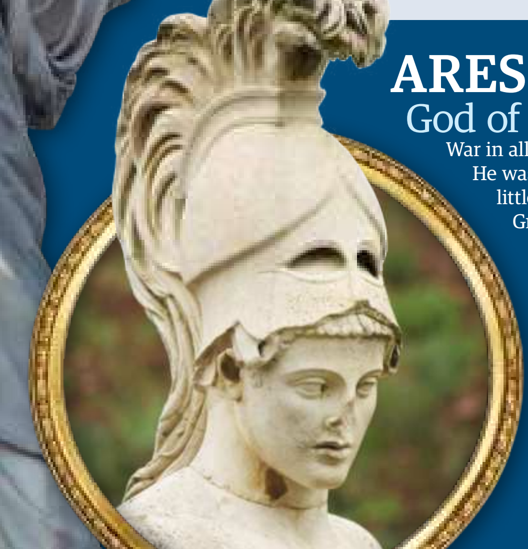
The goddess of love and beauty, Aphrodite was born out of the sea foam when Cronus tossed the severed genitals of Uranus into the waves, though another myth gives her a less gruesome birth and makes her the daughter of Zeus and the goddess Dione. Her major cult centre was Cyprus, where she is said to have been born. Oddly, the loveliest of goddesses was married to the ugliest of gods, Hephaestus the lame smith of Olympus. She was not faithful to him, and was once caught naked in bed with Ares, the god of war, by a magic net fashioned by her cuckolded and outraged husband.

Aphrodite figured prominently in the start of the Trojan War. When she, Hera and Athena each sought to claim the title of most beautiful, they had Paris, the son of the king of Troy, choose between them. Hera offered him power, Athena promised victory, but Aphrodite told him that she would make the most beautiful woman in the world his own.

## ARTEMIS

### Virgin goddess of the hunt

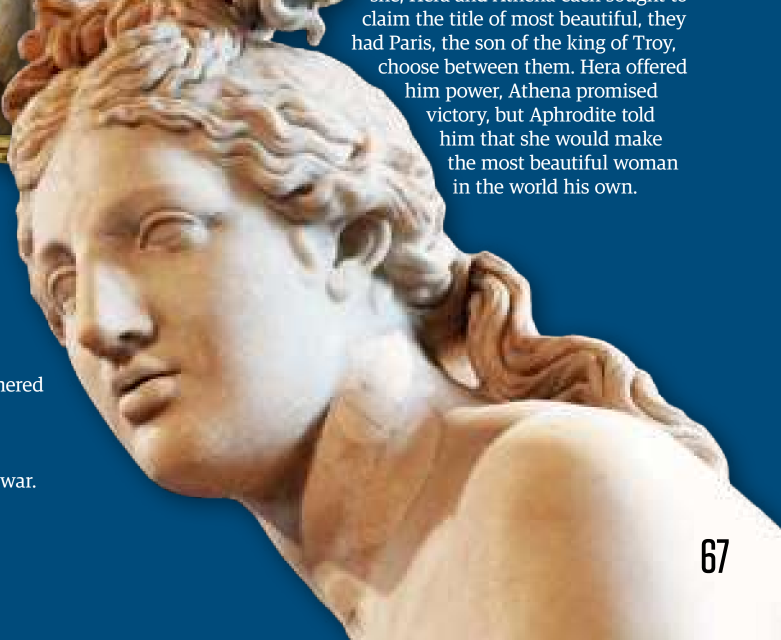
Artemis was the twin sister of Apollo and daughter of Zeus by Letos. She was a virgin huntress – often depicted carrying a bow and arrows – and also the patroness of women undergoing childbirth. Being the goddess of virginity and a protector of young girls, she fiercely guarded her own modesty. When the unlucky hunter Actaeon stumbled upon her while she was bathing in a sacred spring, the goddess, outraged at having been seen unclothed, turned him into a stag for his transgression. His own hounds promptly tore him limb from limb.



## ARES

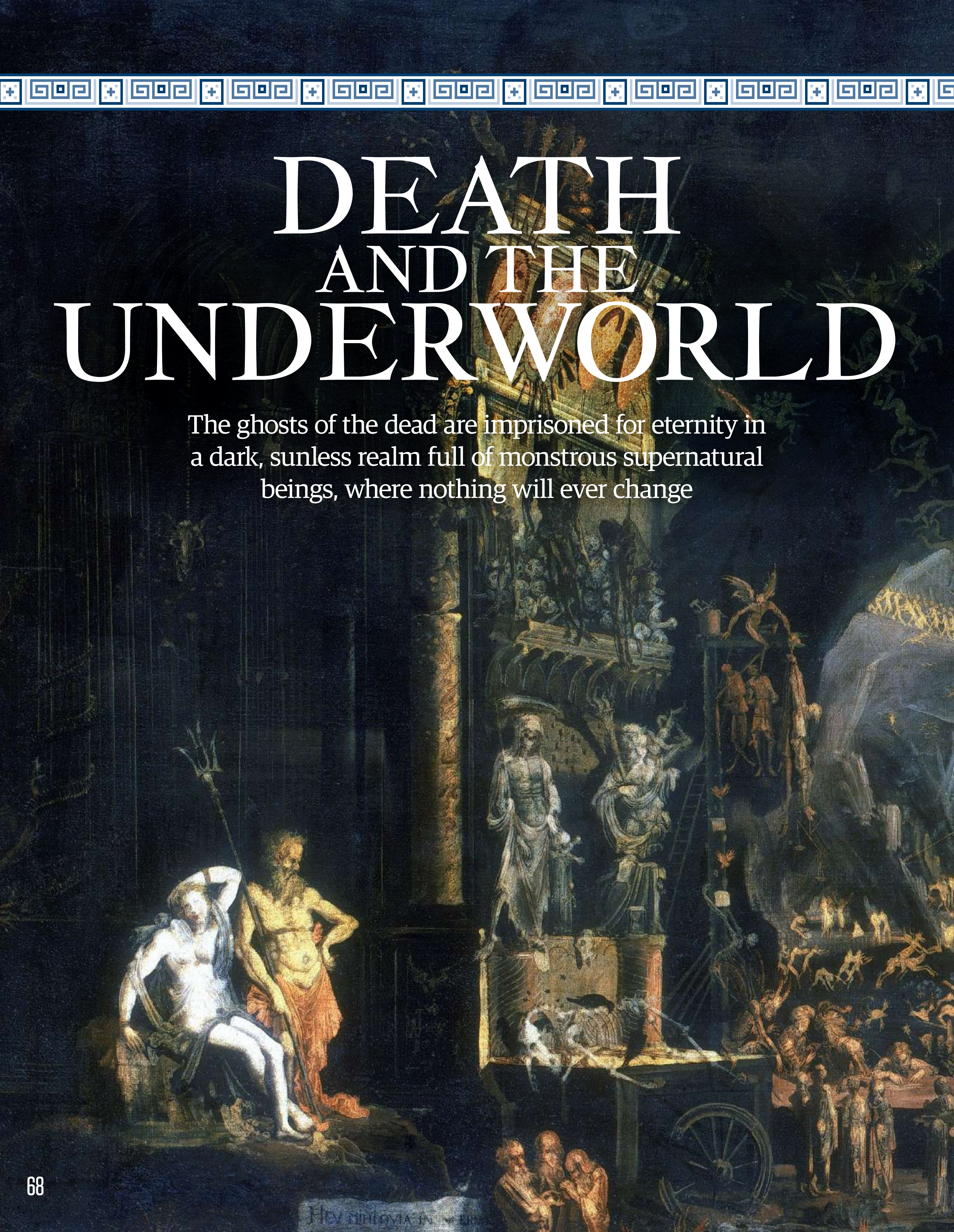
### God of war

War in all its fearsome brutality was represented by Ares. He was the son of Zeus by his queen, Hera, but was little liked by his father and the other gods. The Greeks themselves had little love for the deity on account of the horrors that war brought with it. One goddess that did favour Ares, though, was Aphrodite, the love goddess, with whom he fathered four children, but she was at the time already married to Hephaestus. Two of these children were Phobos (Fear) and Deimos (Terror), each representing concepts closely associated with war.



# DEATH AND THE UNDERWORLD

The ghosts of the dead are imprisoned for eternity in a dark, sunless realm full of monstrous supernatural beings, where nothing will ever change



*'The Underworld'*, a painting by Francois de Nome (c1593-1644)

According to a popular story, the brothers Zeus, Poseidon and Hades divided up the cosmos between them by casting lots. Hades received the Underworld - henceforth the House of Hades - and it was sometimes said that he wasn't happy with his luck. Just what had he won?

If Olympus was like life, but more so, with everything being more vivid, food and drink tasting better, music sounding better, and so on, and the gods being stronger, more beautiful, wiser and happier than mortals - with no death and no real cares - then the Underworld was very much the opposite.

For mortals, in the Underworld there was only death and, inasmuch as they felt anything, sorrow. In the oldest Greek view of the House of Hades, with few exceptions the dead carried on more or less as they had done in life, but in a bloodless, joyless, mechanical way, without colour or feeling, and without any real connection to or communication with the other ghosts around them. They had no strength, intelligence or vigour, and were prone to forgetfulness. They didn't change at all from the moment of death - even down to those who had died violently still bearing their bloody wounds - and nothing they did was meaningful. They lived in perpetual darkness.

The Realm of Hades is described as being at the outer bounds of the ocean, beneath the depths or at the ends of the earth

There were very few heroes who were said to enjoy something better, and there were very few transgressors against the gods themselves who were said to endure specially designed torments, but traditionally little emphasis was placed on this. The House of Hades was more a prison of sorts than a place of punishment, and it didn't seem to serve any purpose except for cutting the dead off from the world of the living. There they stayed, sometimes said to know what was happening above them and to be able to advise the living, sometimes said to be ignorant, and usually thought to be unable to do much of anything at all.

In Homer's *Odyssey*, the heroes summon the dead on the threshold of the Underworld by offering a sacrifice of sheep's blood, milk, honey and wine, and ghosts flock around them making strange, speechless noises, thirsty to drink the blood that can restore them briefly to full consciousness and give them the ability to speak to the living. Without drinking, even the ghost of Odysseus' own mother can't recognise him. The shade of Achilles, the greatest hero of the Trojan War, the man who in the *Iliad* decided it was better to live a short and glorious life than a long and obscure one, tells Odysseus that he would rather be another man's serf working a plough and alive, than be a king among the dead. Such was the shadow life in the House of Hades, where even the most menial servitude of the living in the world above was preferable.

It's a strangely bleak view of death, almost worse than being judged and then punished. It's also shocking that great Achilles was not one of the heroes to be granted a place among the blessed. If not him, then who? Homer wasn't the only authority on the Underworld, and there are other stories in which Achilles had a happier time of things in the House of Hades, while ideas about the fate of the dead came to be more complex with time, but this sombre traditional picture of dreary eternity continued to be a fundamental part of the Greek view of death. Perhaps it is part of why they valued life so highly, and strove to make so much of it.

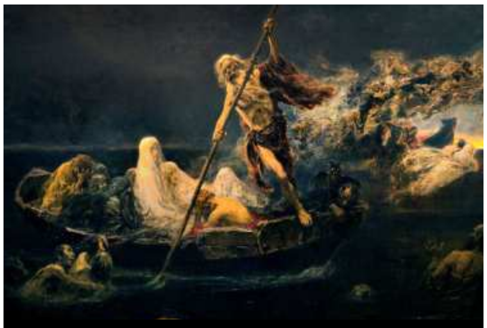
The dead weren't the only inhabitants of the Underworld, of course. There were many supernatural residents, few of whom you'd want to meet. Plus, in addition to the gods and goddesses, the defeated Titans - the pre-Olympian gods - were imprisoned by Zeus below in deep Tartarus, along with the human 'special prisoners'.

Many of the divinities of the Underworld were obvious personifications of abstract ideas and emotions, and some of the place names, especially the rivers, followed suit. It's not hard to work out what the goddess Nyx (night) and the River Lethe ('forgetfulness') are about. However, the Greeks didn't envisage the Underworld as a vague abstraction; to them, it was a real and definite physical place - possibly located somewhere in the west, where the sun set into darkness every night - that could be roughly mapped.

There was no single authoritative account of the Underworld. As with the other myths, there was a mass of incomplete and sometimes contradictory stories. Nevertheless, a broad outline was widely accepted, at least in terms of traditional beliefs; philosophers, mystics and other speculators sometimes had their own ideas.

## MAPPING THE UNDERWORLD

In the *Odyssey*, the travellers sail to the edge of the world to find the entrance to the House of Hades. They find a dark, foggy land of poplars and willows where two of the rivers of the Underworld - Phlegethon (or Pyriphlegethon) and Cocytus ('lamentation') - flow into a third, Acheron. The sources disagree as to where exactly this is, but some real rivers are identified with these mythical ones. The real Acheron, for example, is in northwestern Greece, where its most striking feature is the gorge that it flows through upstream,



Charon the Boatman ferrying the dead across either the Styx or the Acheron, depending on who you choose to believe

## Rivers of the Underworld

Rivers were an important feature of the Underworld. There were six of them, each highly symbolic. Some also served a practical function.

Styx ('abomination') served as a barrier, keeping the dead both inside and outside the House of Hades, as required. When you crossed it, you were crossing over to the land of the dead. In some versions, it flowed into an Underworld lake. Some writers placed it in the Chelmos mountain range in northern Arcadia. Oaths sworn using its waters were sacred.

The waters of Lethe ('oblivion') made the dead forget their past existence when drunk. However, in the Underworld scene in the *Odyssey*, the dead retain their memories.

In some sources, the dead are ferried across Acheron ('pain' or 'groaning'), as well as or instead of Styx. It has a real-world source in northwest Greece, flowing from the Thresprotian mountains to the sea, having joined the Cocytus.

Cocytus ('lamentation') and Phlegethon ('flaming', also known as Pyriphlegethon, 'blazing with fire') flow into Acheron in the myths.

Odysseus beached his ship on the shore of Oceana, the world-encircling river, when he travelled to speak to the dead. It sits at the eastern edge of the Underworld.

which may account for its connection with the descent to the Underworld. Rivers are conspicuous in the Underworld.

New guests of Hades (who was sometimes known as Polydegmon, 'the hospitable') are delivered to the near bank of the river Styx – or Acheron, depending on who you listen to. Here they must pay Charon to take them across in his boat to the House of Hades. His fee is an obol, and Greeks would be buried with a coin under their tongues unless they had no one to pay their fare. Those without money would be left to wander forever on the river bank, unless they could evade their hosts and sneak in through a back entrance. Similarly, Charon refuses to embark those who have not been buried. Leaving the dead unburied was sacrilegious, and indeed Odysseus was rebuked by the ghost of an unburied comrade when he spoke to the summoned dead outside the Underworld.

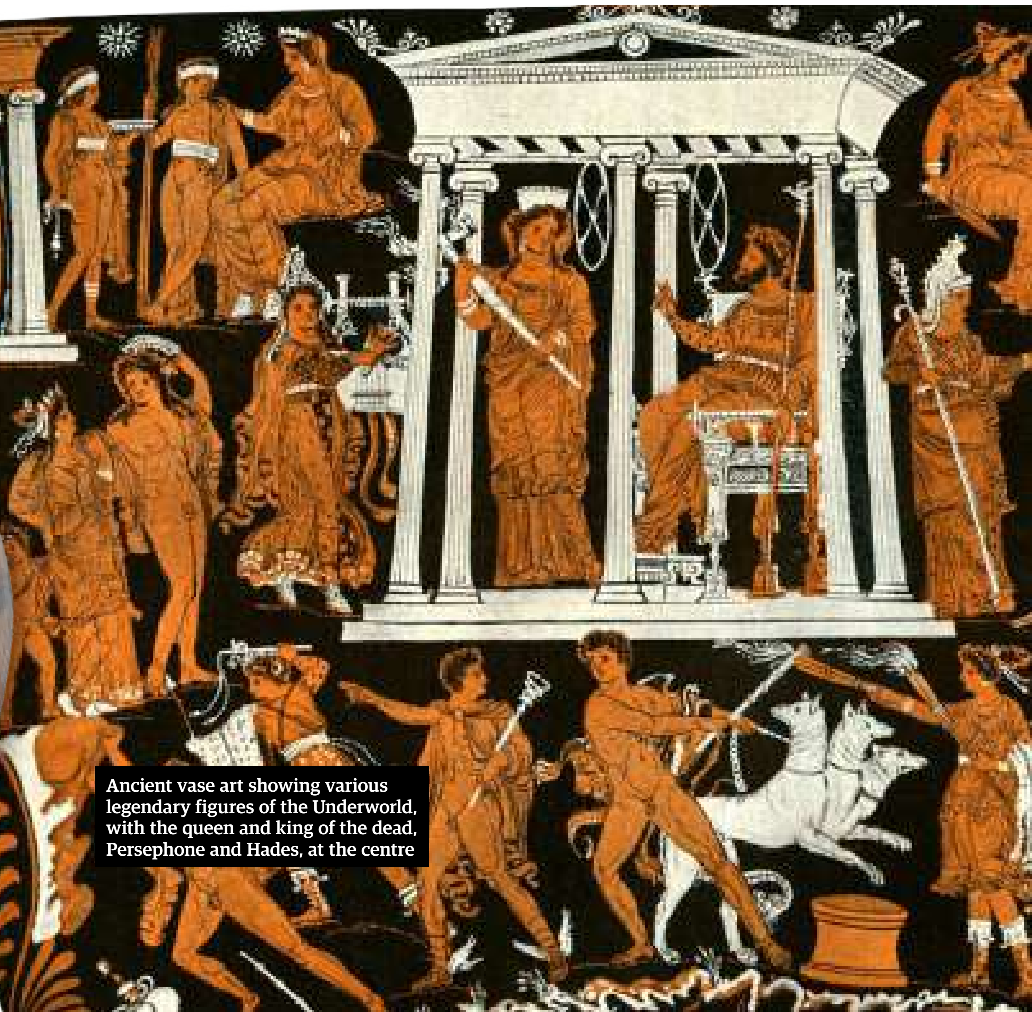
Various gods, goddesses and mythical creatures were sometimes said to inhabit the entrance to the Underworld, while it was also said to contain an elm bearing false dreams. But on the far bank of Styx (or Acheron) lived a beast, the multi-headed watchdog Cerberus. In most accounts he had three heads, but the poet Hesiod claimed he had 50. His tail was a snake while serpent heads grew from his back, and he was welcoming to the newly dead, but hostile towards trespassers and especially living mortals. His foul saliva was said to have created the poison aconite when it dribbled to the earth, and his appearance was so repellant that looking on him could turn men to stone. He was ferocious but not invincible, having been bested by Heracles. However, Orpheus managed to charm him with music to gain entry to the Underworld.

> At the point of death, the soul is separated from the body and transported to the entrance of the Underworld

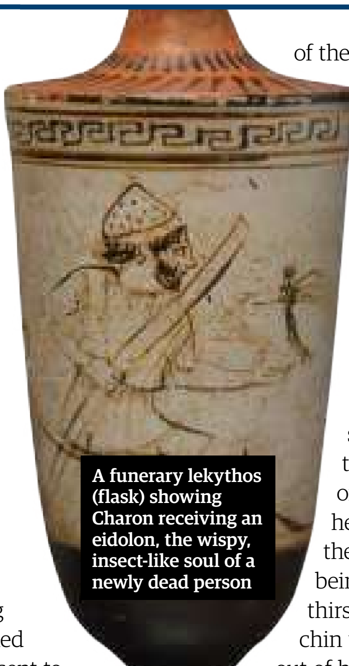
In many accounts, those who made it into the House of Hades would then come to the seated figures of Minos, Rhadamanthus and Aeacus. The first two were ancient kings of Crete, famed for their laws and wisdom. Aeacus had been renowned for being just when alive. These three, all mortal sons of Zeus, were said to be the judges of the Underworld, though their real roles and importance weren't entirely clear. It was sometimes said that Rhadamanthus resolved disputes between the dead, rather than judging them.

Only the very wicked and the outstandingly meritorious were given special treatment by the judges; most of the dead were viewed as being

Sisyphus was a cunning adversary of the gods when alive, but paid for his tricks and impiety in the afterlife



Ancient vase art showing various legendary figures of the Underworld, with the queen and king of the dead, Persephone and Hades, at the centre



A funerary lekythos (flask) showing Charon receiving an eidolon, the wispy, insect-like soul of a newly dead person

more or less neutral. At least in the older stories, the emphasis was on the relationship of the dead person with the gods; only those who had specifically offended against them were wicked enough to be sent for everlasting punishment, and only those who were well connected, such as heroes with a divine parent, were good enough to be sent somewhere favourable. It also seemed rather arbitrary, with some heroes doing rather better than others for no apparent reason.

Most of the dead would then be sent to the Plain of Asphodel. Descriptions of this place varied, but it mainly seemed to be bland and and featureless, despite its promising name. Those who were to be punished would either remain in Hades or be sent to Tartarus, while those who were being rewarded might journey to Elysium or the Isles of the Blessed, although the latter two may have actually been the same place.

Tartarus was not exactly in the Underworld, at least in some versions; in Homer's *Iliad* it was said by Zeus to be in the deepest abyss, as far below the House of Hades as the sky is above the Earth. Originally it was the prison for the Titans, as much for safekeeping as or punishment, but then it was also used to house those humans who had particularly offended the gods.

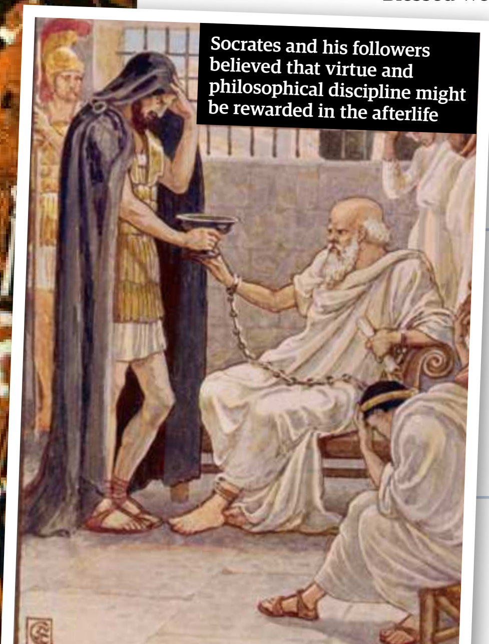
Those mortals chosen for special punishment included Tantalus, from whose name we have the word 'tantalise' because of the nature of his punishment. He seemed pretty determined to invite the wrath of the gods, with various outstanding crimes being attributed to him. Most notoriously, he tried to test the gods' omniscience by inviting them to a banquet and serving them the flesh of his murdered son, Pelops, in a stew All the gods realised, except Demeter, who was distracted by the absence of her kidnapped daughter, Persephone, and ate some of the shoulder.

Tantalus was also accused of stealing ambrosia and nectar, the food and drink of the gods; of telling tales about what he had heard the gods say; and of lying to them. For this he was punished by being kept everlastingly hungry and thirsty as he stood in water up to his chin with fruit hanging above him, just out of his reach - in other words, he was being tantalised.

Sisyphus also committed multiple crimes, such as murdering guests, which was a major sacrilege. Hosts had a religious duty towards guests, who were under the protection of the gods. Worst of all, he informed on Zeus for one of his affairs. He then tricked both Thanatos and Hades, and cheated death for a time. As punishment, he was sentenced to push a boulder up a hill for eternity, with the stone always rolling down just before it reached the top. This is the origin of the word 'Sisyphean', meaning a task that is endless and futile.

As can be seen, the worst crime was to defy or insult the gods, and it was the impious who received special punishments. Judgment was more religious than explicitly moral in a modern sense, and it usually fitted neatly into a story.

Similarly, the way to find yourself in Elysium or the Isles of the Blessed was to be beloved of the gods. Having Zeus as your father did no harm at all, and being the hero of some famous stories also helped. As with Tartarus, neither of these places was usually thought to be within the Underworld or under the jurisdiction of Hades; the Isles of the Blessed were said to be ruled by Cronos, father of Zeus and other Olympian gods, while in the *Odyssey* Elysium was said to be ruled by Rhadamanthus. Their delights were quite unimaginatively physical with nice weather, good food, no work - basically the ideal holiday venue.



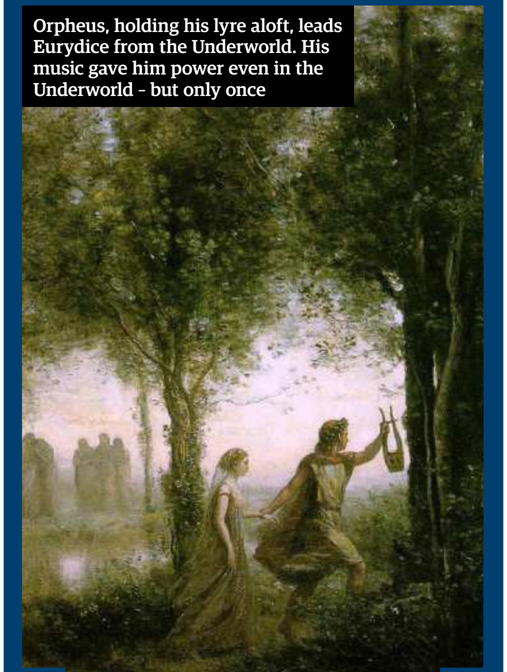
Socrates and his followers believed that virtue and philosophical discipline might be rewarded in the afterlife

## Orpheus and Eurydice

Orpheus was the greatest poet and musician of the ancient world, by reputation, a son of the muse Calliope, and either a son or an associate of Apollo. It was said that his music would entrance wild beasts, and that even trees and stones would come to him to listen. Fanciful as this may be, it's possible that his legend was based on a historical figure and that he was the real founder of the mystic cult of Orphism.

Orpheus was married to Eurydice, possibly a naiad or dryad. When she was bitten fatally by a snake while trying to escape a violent assault, Orpheus resolved to bring her back from the Underworld. His music charmed everyone from Charon and Cerberus through to the three judges of the Underworld, and Hades and Persephone; even the listless dead were mesmerised.

Orpheus was given permission to take Eurydice on the condition that he didn't look at her walking behind him until they were clear of the Underworld, a condition that he obeyed until he reached sunlight and turned to see her become a ghostly mist, and vanish back to the House of Hades, never to walk on earth again. That's the best known version of the story, but in the oldest the couple were successfully reunited; a happier but less memorable ending.



Orpheus, holding his lyre aloft, leads Eurydice from the Underworld. His music gave him power even in the Underworld - but only once

> "Gods, goddesses and mythical creatures were said to inhabit the entrance to the Underworld, while it was also said to contain an elm bearing false dreams"

## The bright side of death

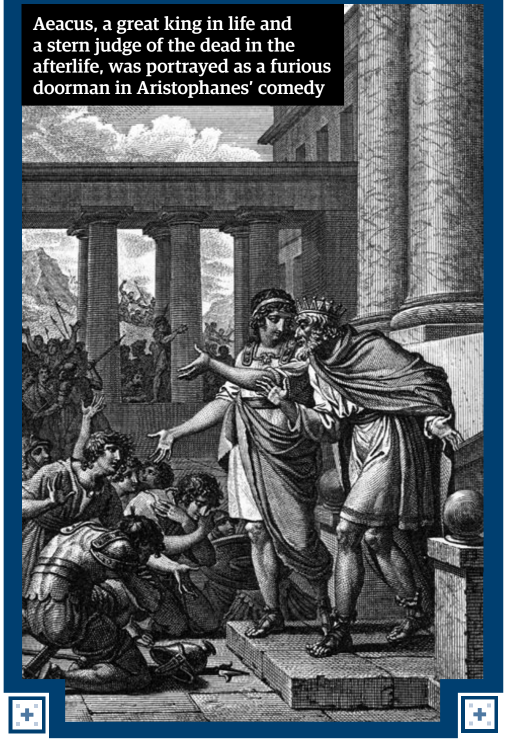
For all the fear and bleakness of their Underworld, the Greeks were occasionally capable of laughing at their solemn and terrible deities – and at the House of Hades itself.

In Aristophanes' comedy *The Frogs* (405 BCE), the god Dionysus travels to the Underworld to fetch back a dead Athenian playwright – he hasn't yet decided which one. He dresses as a sort of pantomime version of the fearsome Hercules, who has previously been to the House of Hades and back, to gain admission.

Famous figures from the Underworld such as Charon and a very bad-tempered Aeacus mingle with innkeepers and amorous chambermaids, and aren't treated with a great deal of reverence. Dionysius himself is a classic cowardly hero, while Aeacus is a classic blustering comedy opponent.

It's hard to gauge just how shocking contemporary Greeks would have found this blasphemy, but it undoubtedly added considerable edge to the laughter.

For all the slapstick humour, Aristophanes portrays the Underworld accurately according to traditional views, while Dionysius also encounters a chorus of Eleusinian initiates.



Aeacus, a great king in life and a stern judge of the dead in the afterlife, was portrayed as a furious doorman in Aristophanes' comedy

It can be argued that it is wrong to view the three judges of the Underworld as part of a regular process. Perhaps they are best seen as parts of the plots of individual myths, like King Arthur being rowed to Avalon when he is dying – one-offs that fit with those stories, and not as something that might happen in the same way each time someone died. They're a way to bring a story to a close.

This is not to say that the Greeks had no interest in justice, punishment and reward in the afterlife, or didn't think about them. From perhaps the 6th century BCE on, it became a subject of increasing interest, but it seemed to be exceptional rather than standard in the traditional stories and beliefs, and not very well developed.

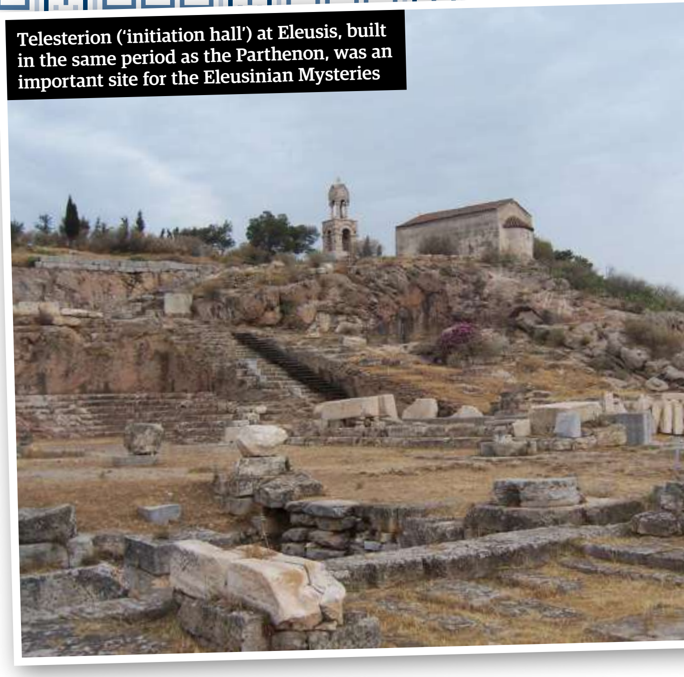
In the meantime, the House of Hades was a vast prison in which almost everyone had received the same sentence for the non-crime of dying. This is why the House of Hades was often represented as having many gates, locks and keys; after all, even Persephone, queen of the dead, was a prisoner of sorts, despite living in the most salubrious quarter of the Underworld, in Hades' sombre but magnificent palace.

### MORE COMPLEXITY AND GREATER JUSTICE

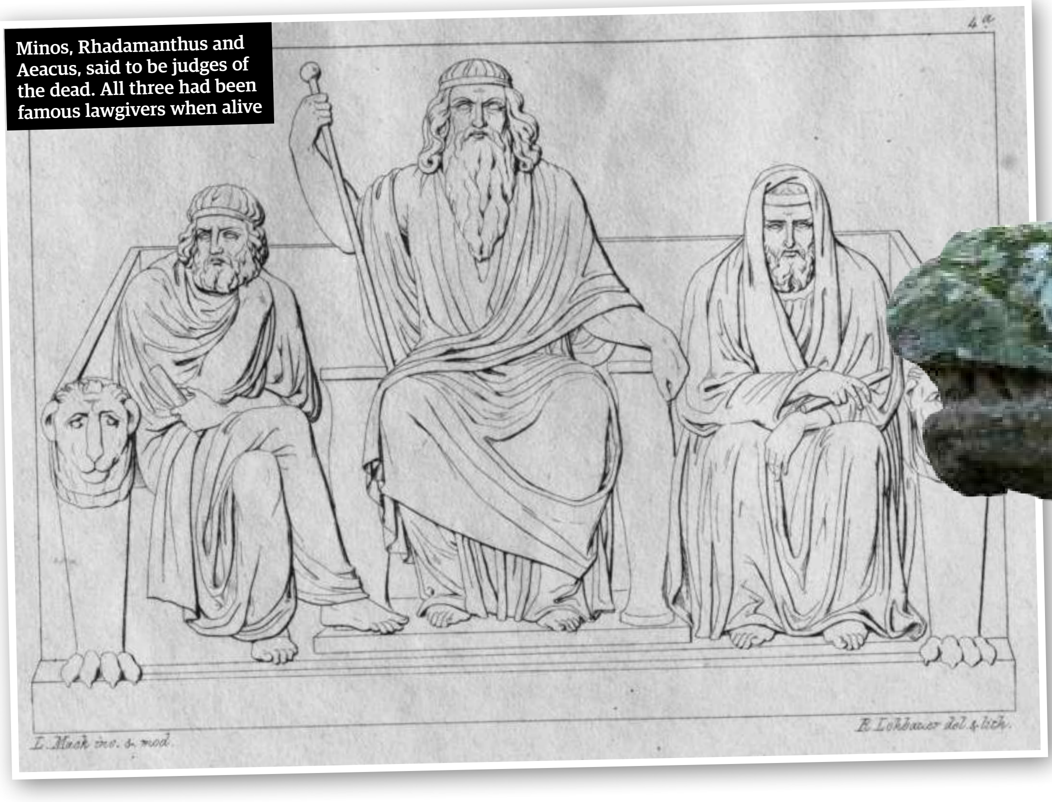
The old view of the afterlife as being impersonal and undifferentiated came under pressure from various religious movements, such as the Orphic and Dionysian cults, and the Eleusinian Mysteries. Philosophers like Plato would also begin to add a moral dimension, as well as scrutinise messy traditional beliefs.

Although philosophers might describe a more abstract vision of the Underworld, some of the religious cults became even more specific about its physical reality. Initiates would be given instructions on what to do and where to go on arrival. Don't drink the waters of forgetfulness; take a right turn here; say these words, and so on. Texts have been found that seemed to serve not just as travel guides for the Underworld, but as passports for special treatment – priority boarding passes, if you like. Cult members would presumably be buried with them, so they'd be to hand on arrival.

The Eleusinian Mysteries centred on a cult of Demeter and Persephone, and was based at Eleusis, not far from Athens. It was an ancient and very secretive cult, and promised members a joyful afterlife as an alternative to the dreary House of Hades. Similarly, the Orphic cult, probably based on the musician Orpheus, and the Dionysian cult, based on the ecstatic god of wine and theatre, promised a much happier afterlife for members.



Telesterion ('initiation hall') at Eleusis, built in the same period as the Parthenon, was an important site for the Eleusinian Mysteries



Minos, Rhadamanthus and Aeacus, said to be judges of the dead. All three had been famous lawgivers when alive

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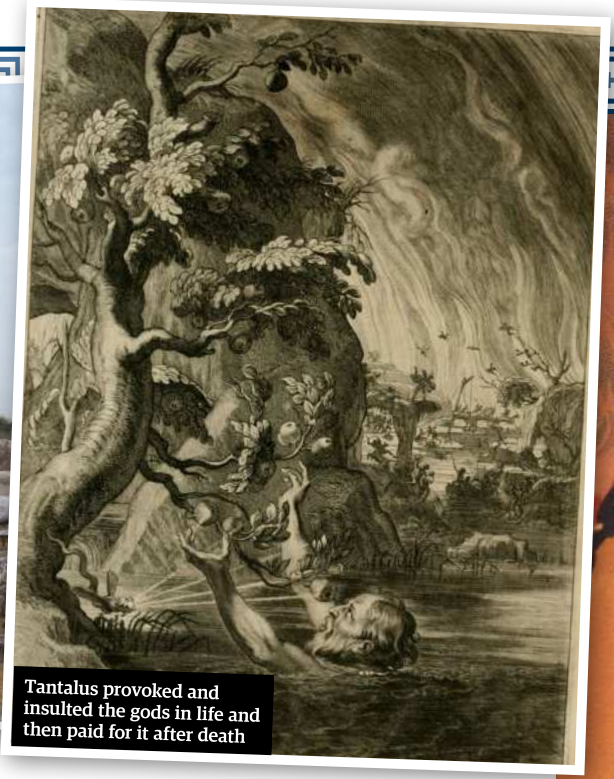
> "The House of Hades was a vast prison in which almost everyone had received the same sentence"

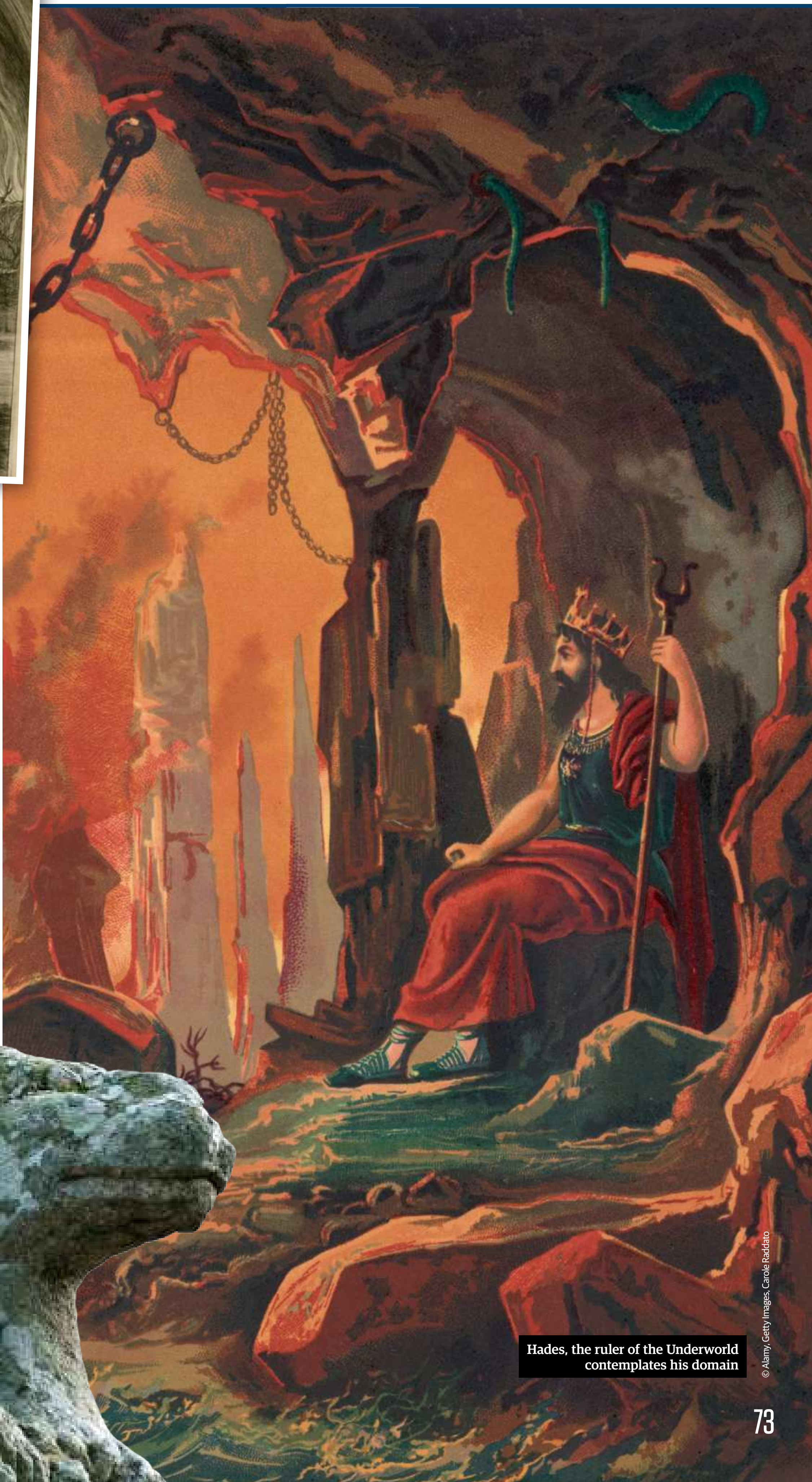


Tantalus provoked and insulted the gods in life and then paid for it after death

What all of these movements shared was a view of the Underworld that was more complex than the traditional one. There were more possibilities for what might happen to you after death; more places to go. Virtue might be rewarded and bad deeds punished. You could affect your afterlife, and not just win the lottery through being related to Zeus. Having been a faithful cult member was also useful, of course, if you wanted to be rewarded.

Meanwhile, in *Phaedo*, his account of the last days of his teacher Socrates, Plato developed a more philosophical version of the same theme. Plato's version of Socrates says that those who have made progress in trying to live virtuously and have purified themselves through philosophy might be released from imprisonment within the earth when dead and then live without bodies in places that are both wonderful and difficult to describe. A higher class of mysticism. It's worth noting that Plato's Socrates still talks about the traditional landmarks of the Underworld, as the old tradition lived on. It was just being transformed.

Did Cerberus, the fearsome watchdog of the Underworld, have three heads, or 50?



Hades, the ruler of the Underworld contemplates his domain

© Alamy, Getty Images, Carole Raddato

# DIVINITIES OF DEATH

With few exceptions, the divine inhabitants of the Underworld were strange, cold, dark, unlovable and terrifying, but they all had a role to play

## HADES

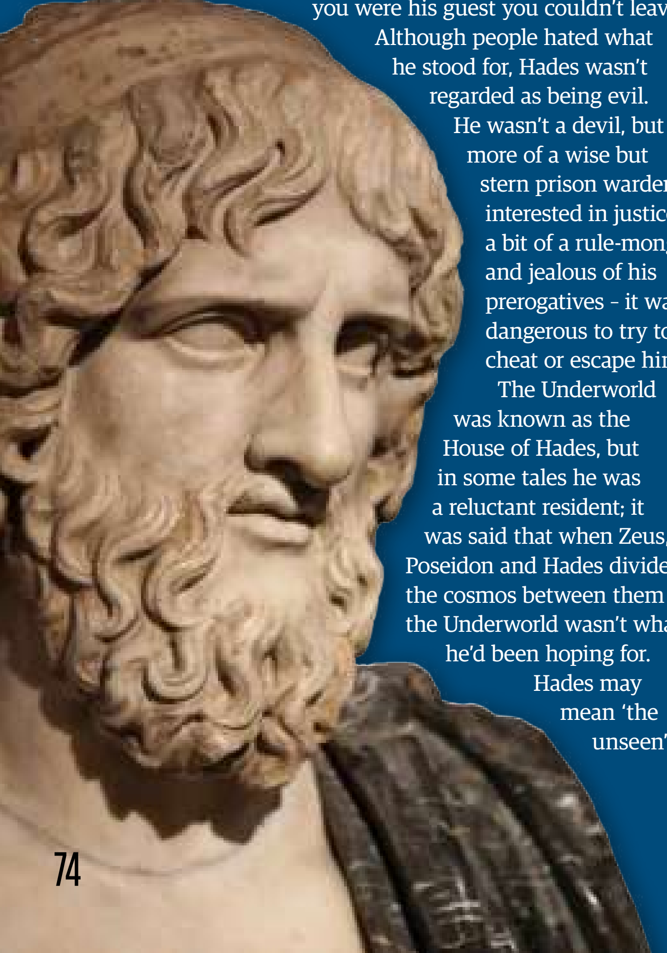
### Ruler of the Underworld

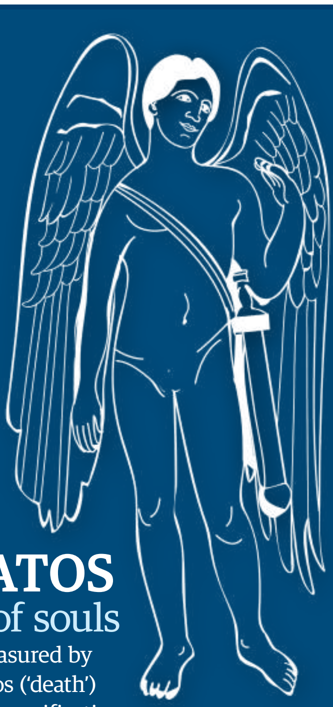
As the brother and equal of Zeus and Poseidon, and the lord of the Underworld and king of the dead, Hades was among the grandest of the Olympian gods, but he was not often worshipped or invoked, and he rarely took centre stage in stories. In fact, Greeks disliked even saying his name, which was thought to be unlucky. They used all sorts of alternatives and euphemisms to avoid it.

Among other things, he was Pluto ('the rich') because as a god of the earth he helped make crops grow, hoarded precious metals and minerals, and was a creator of wealth, while with some bitter irony he was Polydegmon ('the hospitable') as all humankind came to him eventually, and he was Pylartes ('the gatefastener') as once you were his guest you couldn't leave.

Although people hated what he stood for, Hades wasn't regarded as being evil. He wasn't a devil, but more of a wise but stern prison warden, interested in justice if a bit of a rule-monger and jealous of his prerogatives – it was dangerous to try to cheat or escape him.

The Underworld was known as the House of Hades, but in some tales he was a reluctant resident; it was said that when Zeus, Poseidon and Hades divided the cosmos between them the Underworld wasn't what he'd been hoping for. Hades may mean 'the unseen'.



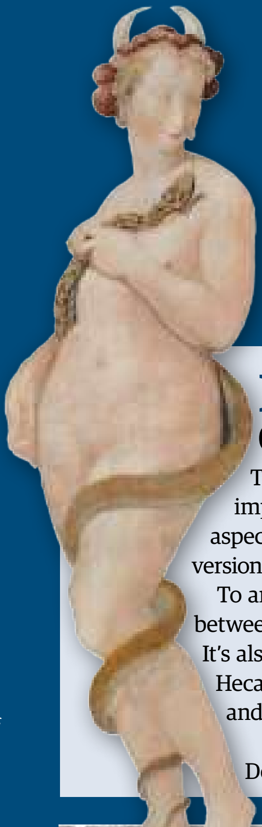


## THANATOS

### Fetcher of souls

When the thread spun, cut and measured by the Moirai came to an end, Thanatos ('death') would come for you. He was the personification of death, the Greeks' Grim Reaper.

The son of Nyx ('night') and the brother of Hypnos ('sleep'), he was almost impossible to cheat, and it was perilous to try. Heracles, as always, was the exception, and was the only person to beat death. Although Sisyphus succeeded in tricking Thanatos, he later suffered everlasting torment as punishment.



## HECATE

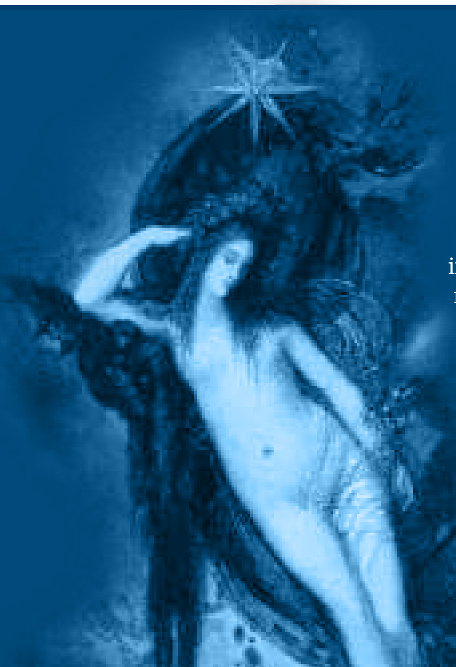
### Goddess of fertility and witchcraft

The ancient poet Hesiod thought that Hecate was one of the most important divinities, benevolent and full of gifts. This was her in her aspect as fertility goddess. When she appeared in Apollonius of Rhodes' version of the tale of Jason and the Argonauts, she was the dread goddess. To an extent this demonstrates the association the Greeks made between the Underworld, death and fertility, which makes a certain sense. It's also a good example of the variety and contradictions of their myths. Hecate was linked with infernal magic, necromancy, ghosts, herb lore and poison, favouring the night and places thought of as no man's land. However, Hecate was said to have been a sympathetic friend to Demeter and Persephone, who she helped guide to and from Hades.

## STYX

### Goddess of the river

Styx ('abomination') lived in a silver-pillared palace in the Underworld, and was much respected by Zeus after she aided him in the war against the Titans. She was the ruler of the River Styx, which flowed from Mount Chelmos in Arcadia down into the Underworld, where it ran nine times round the kingdom of the dead. As a mark of respect, Zeus proclaimed that no oath sworn by the waters of Styx should ever be broken, and even divine oathbreakers were severely punished. Styx was said to be a daughter of Oceanus and Tethys.



## NYX

### Goddess of night

Among the most ancient of Greek deities, Nyx ('night') was born of primordial Chaos. She was the mother of some of the most fundamental - and often terrible - gods and goddesses, many of them without male intervention. These included some of the Underworld's most important divine inhabitants, not least Thanatos, and deities who were related to death in various ways, such as Hypnos ('sleep'), Oneiroi ('dreams'), Nemesis ('retribution'), Moros ('fate'), Ker ('doom') and Geras ('old age'). Nyx successfully defied Zeus when he wanted to expel Hypnos from Olympus, and was not to be trifled with.

## PERSEPHONE

### Queen of the Underworld

The daughter of Zeus and Demeter, Persephone was originally a grain goddess, like her mother. She became an eminent, if part-time, resident of the Underworld after she was abducted by Hades.

Having persuaded his brother Zeus - but not his sister Demeter - that he should marry Persephone, Hades seized her in his chariot and took her to the Underworld. When Demeter eventually found her abducted daughter, she was told that she could only bring her back if she hadn't eaten anything while in the House of Hades, but Persephone had eaten some pomegranate seeds. Zeus then pronounced a compromise settlement in which Persephone would marry Hades and live with him as queen of the Underworld for either four or six months a year - the stories vary - and then spend the remainder of her time in the upper realm. In the other myths in which she features, Persephone gives no sign that she objects to being queen of the dead, and she and Hades act together.

Persephone is one of the most allegorical divinities, with her time in the Underworld symbolising the temporary death of winter, and her time in the upper world symbolising the return of fertility every year.

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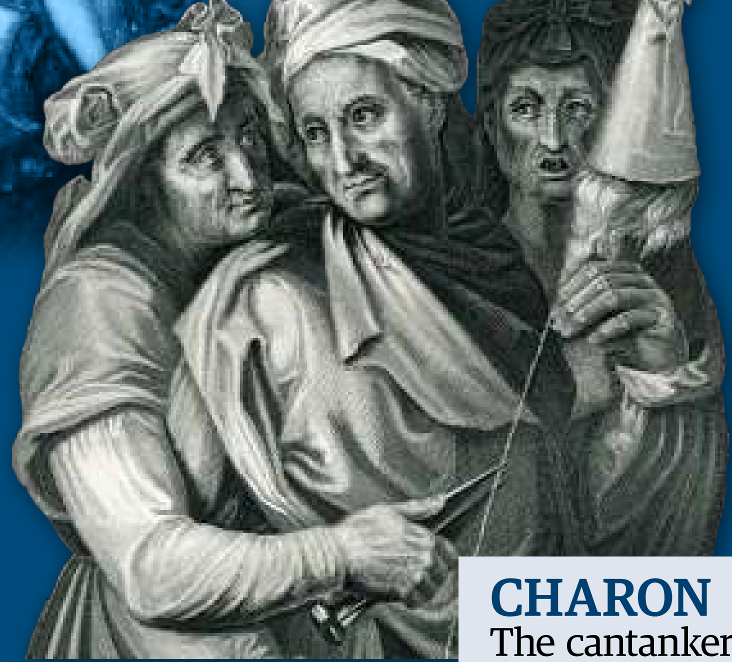


## THE MOIRAI

### Guardians of destiny

Could anyone or anything stand up to, or even overrule Zeus? Possibly the Moirai ('allotters'), depending on who you listen to.

The Moirai - generally called the Fates in English - were much older than the gods of Olympus, and were believed to determine, or at least record and supervise, personal destiny and things to come. When you were born, they would measure out your allotted lifespan and your fortune. Although it's not always clear and is sometimes contradictory in the myths, they didn't seem to make decisions; what they said was instead an impersonal expression of order and balance in the universe. Nor is it clear whether the gods were wholly subordinate to their rulings or could change fate - there are examples of both.

Clotho ('she who spins'), Lachesis ('disposer of lots') and Atropos ('inevitable') were often pictured as old women, with one spinning out a thread for each person's life, one cutting it and one measuring it. The symbolism is clear enough, however ambiguous their role and powers were.

Although they were viewed as solemn, ancient and immovable, in one story Apollo was said to have got round them by getting them drunk.

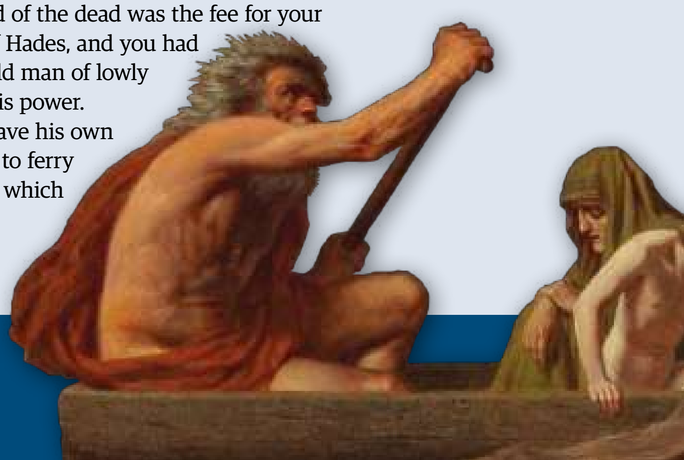
## CHARON

### The cantankerous boatman

The son of Erebus ('darkness') and Nyx ('night'), Charon received the souls of the newly dead, and conveyed them across the River Styx (or possibly Acheron) into the House of Hades. His reputation was as a squalid, grasping, ill-tempered old man. Although his occupation as a ferryman was regarded as being menial, he was important and had to be treated with respect; if you didn't pay his fee of an obol you would linger at the far shore of Styx/Acheron forever. Thus Greeks were always buried with a coin in their mouths, unless they were both penniless and friendless.

Charon served a symbolic purpose: no matter what your station had been in life, however rich and glorious you had been, all you could bring with you to the land of the dead was the fee for your passage into the House of Hades, and you had to pay that to a peevish old man of lowly station, who had you in his power.

Charon didn't always have his own way; Hercules forced him to ferry him across the Styx, after which Hades punished him by putting him in chains for a year.



# GREEK LEGEND

For those living in Ancient Greece the myths that we still tell today were not simply stories, but an integral part of their society, culture and lives

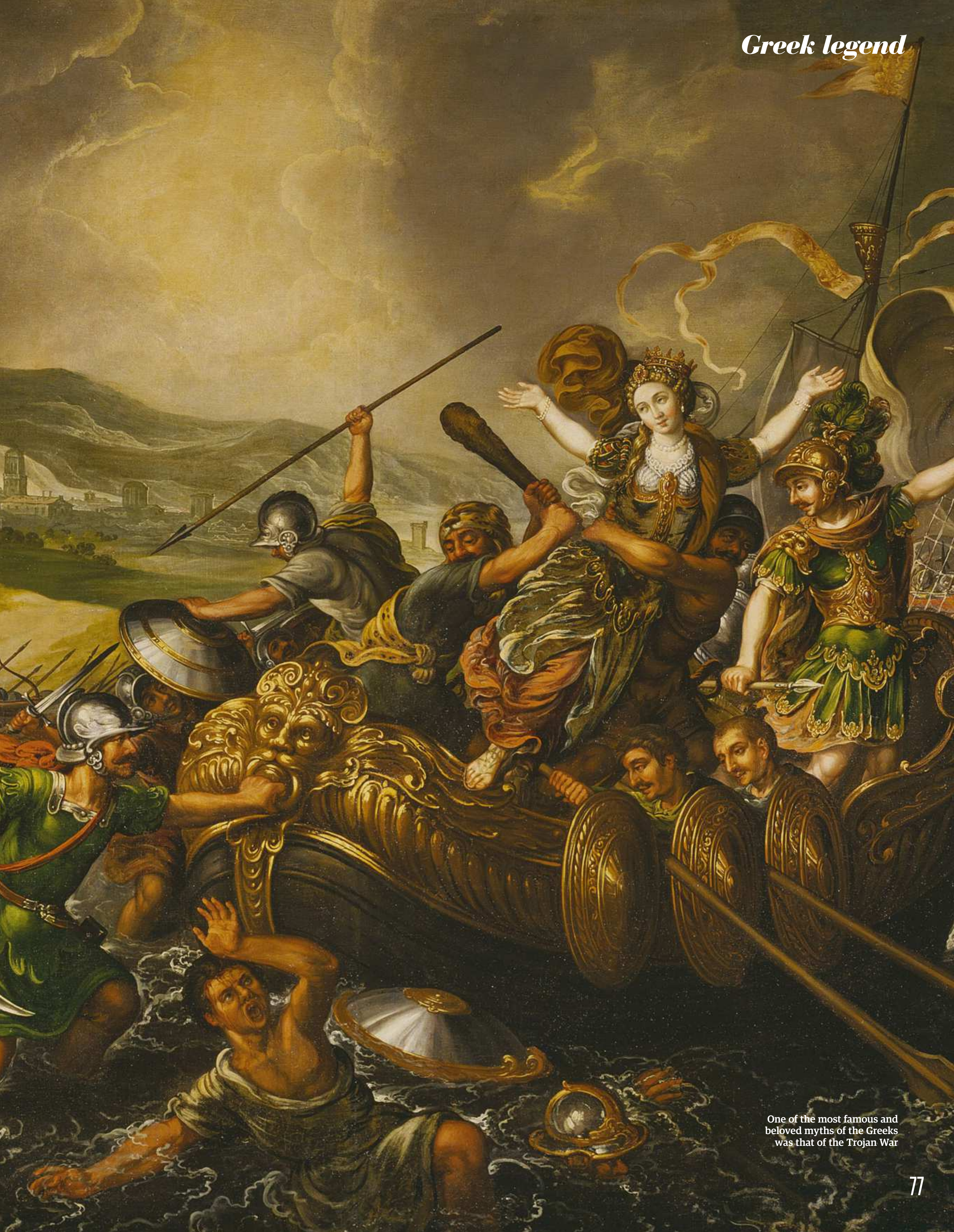
There are many ancient cultures in the world, and most of them have developed rich mythologies over time, from the mighty Norse gods of Odin and Thor to the animal-like figures of the Egyptian religion. But none of these have proved as enduring as the tales and heroes of Greek mythology. With its cautionary tales of men and women who were led down dark paths by their own excess, mighty gods and beautiful goddesses and heroes who vanquished the most frightening of beasts, Greek mythology has proved itself so popular that even the rise of Christianity could not squash it.

This mythology was just as important to the Ancient Greeks. It provided a common history, heroes and religion to the many different tribes, uniting them together as one people. Not only did it help spread Greek as a language, but it also worked in tandem with the growth of their society, providing answers to huge questions about their place in the universe and why the planet behaved the way it did. Mythology became more than simply fantastical tales, it was integral to the Greeks' way of life, and it touched on every part of their society. Present from when the people woke in the morning to when they fell asleep, mythology was the beating heart of Ancient Greece.

As with almost all myths, tales and legends, Greek mythology began life as an oral tradition. Without widespread literacy the stories were likely told to listeners by Bronze Age Minoan and Mycenaean bards. We know little about how this oral tradition developed, and while it is likely that tales became more embellished and differed by region, it is also possible that there were strict rules for story-telling. It wasn't until the 8th century BCE that these oral traditions were written down. The most famous of the early written sources of Greek mythology are Homer's epic poems, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, detailing the Trojan War and the story of Odysseus respectively. More early sources for Greek mythology are Hesiod's *Theogony* and *Works and Days*, which concern the origin of the gods and the creation of man. From this point on, the representation and retelling of myths steamed forward with vigour.

Women are generally not portrayed well in Greek myth. The first woman, Pandora was responsible for unleashing evil in the world

Epic duels between heroes and monsters, muses, gods and a cornucopia of mythical scenes and stories were painted on pottery of all kinds. These popular and portable forms of storytelling didn't require literate readers, and helped the myths spread wider afield. Many of some of the most well-



One of the most famous and beloved myths of the Greeks was that of the Trojan War

> ““They were driven by pursuits of the mind and were quick to question the nature of the world”

known myths, such as the trials of Heracles, were found on pottery, rather than literary texts. Many more pottery pieces pre-date the first recorded literary versions of the same tales.

Myths then began to permeate the very structures of Greek civilisation; public buildings like the Parthenon, the Temple of Apollo and the Temple of Zeus were adorned with painstakingly crafted statues and images from mythology. These tales of heroes and monsters were not campfire stories, but a very central, crucial part of Greek culture and civilisation. In the 5th century they were reborn on the stage, by the work of the tragic writers Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. The figures from myth and legend were made real, dramatised in front of thousands of eager viewers, who would fill theatres to see the stories they already knew retold again and again. Mythology was more than religion, more than entertainment - it permeated every part of their lives. Although it would be wrong to assume every Greek was a fervent believer, their importance in society and the significance they held in the culture itself is clear to see, even today.

Like most religions and mythologies, the myths set out to answer some of the deepest questions of the human existence. Where did we come from? Who made the world? The Greeks explained this with ‘Chaos’ a yawning void of nothingness from that sprung Gaia (the Earth) and other divine beings. The story goes on to tell tales of repeated father-son usurping, a relatable story for the patriarchal society of heirs and inherited power. Like many Greek myths, although the stories themselves are fantastical (like Zeus swallowing his wife to avoid being usurped by his own offspring) the key themes and morals are relatable, which is

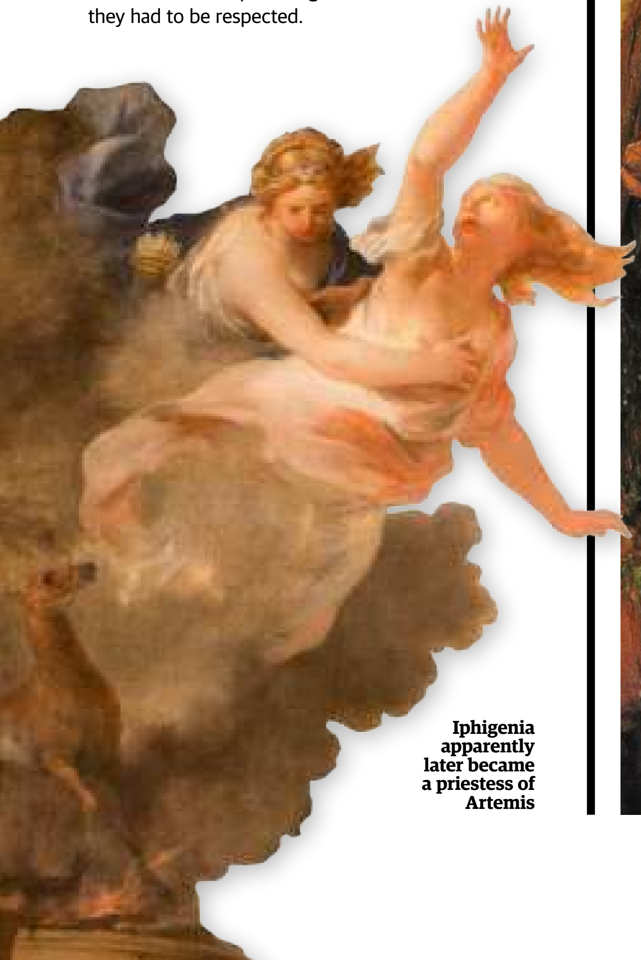
## Iphigenia and the Trojan War

The oldest daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, Iphigenia was possibly expected to live a somewhat happy life, being that her father was the son of King Atreus and hoped to victorious over the Trojans in the Battle of Troy. However, her story took a turn for the worse when her father killed a deer sacred to the goddess Artemis.

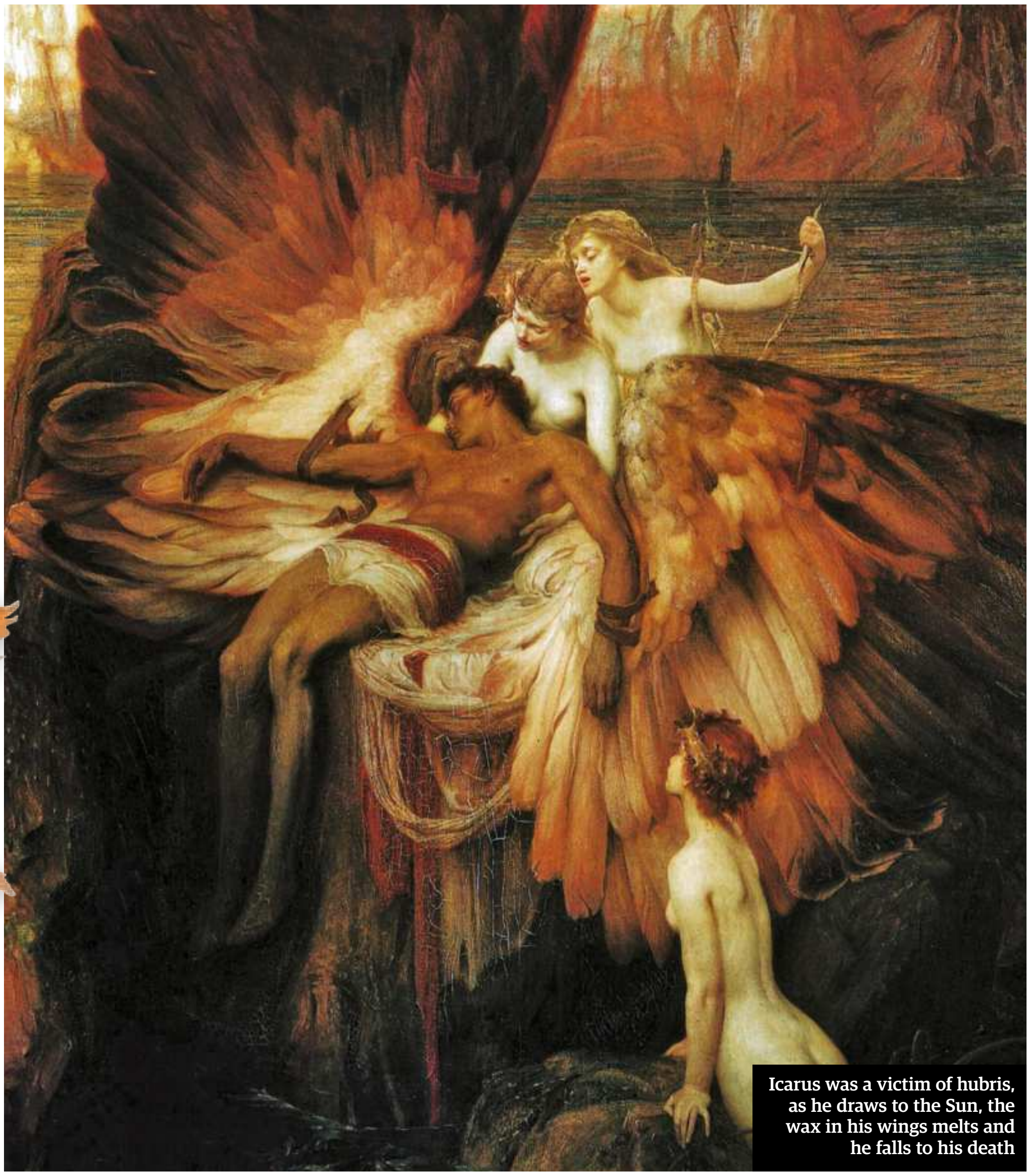
The deity was angry – so angry in fact, that she stopped all of the winds so that Agamemnon couldn’t set sail to play his part in the Trojan War. The solution to the problem, according to the seer Calchas, was straightforward – Iphigenia had to be sacrificed to appease the goddess and right the wrongs that were made by Agamemnon.

Agamemnon chose to tell his wife and daughter that Iphigenia was to marry the great Greek hero Achilles before they left for their journey across the Aegean and so the family happily made their way to port-town of Aulis. It was upon their arrival that they discovered the truth – Iphigenia had been brought to die. As Achilles tried to stop the sacrifice from going ahead, Iphigenia knew what it was that she had to do, and then plunged the knife into her own chest, paying her father’s debt.

Some accounts say that at this point, Artemis swapped the child for a deer so as to spare her life but the moral was simple: the gods were in control and they had to be respected.



**Iphigenia apparently later became a priestess of Artemis**

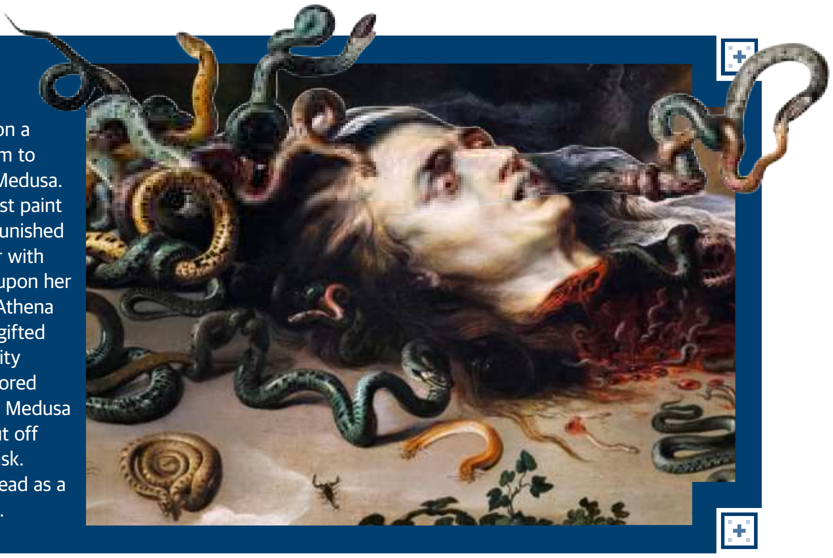


**Icarus was a victim of hubris, as he draws to the Sun, the wax in his wings melts and he falls to his death**

## Perseus and Medusa

Acrisius, King of Argos, growing frustrated at not having a son, went to the oracle of Delphi for advice. However, she told him that his own grandson was fated to kill him. Terrified of the warning he imprisoned his daughter, Danae, in a room beneath the earth. However, Danae fell pregnant as Zeus pierced through the walls of the chamber in the form of golden rain. Wanting to be rid of his grandson, Acrisius sent the newborn Perseus and Danae out into the open sea. However the two washed ashore Serifos Island.

As Perseus grew up the king of the island, Polydectes began to lust after Danae and, knowing he could not approach her with Perseus protecting her sent him off on a dangerous mission. He challenged him to return with the head of the Gorgon Medusa. Medusa's origin story differs, but most paint her as a beautiful maiden who was punished by Athena and turned into a monster with live snakes for hair, whoever looked upon her was turned to stone. Perseus asked Athena and Hermes for assistance and they gifted him winged sandals, a cap of invisibility and a mirrored shield. Using the mirrored shield, Perseus was able to approach Medusa without looking directly at her. He cut off Medusa's head and completed the task. Perseus would continue to use the head as a weapon, turning Polydectes to stone.



likely why they resonated so strongly with people all over the region.

The Ancient Greeks lived in a society led by philosophy and science. They were driven by pursuits of the mind and were quick to question the nature of the world, and this can certainly explain why so many of their myths provide explanations for natural phenomena. Although they are far from scientific, they explain some of the basic aspects of nature. For example, sunset and sunrise are explained as the result of the god Helios riding his chariot across the sky, while earthquakes are Poseidon crashing his trident into the ground. There are stories to explain echoes, rainbows, constellations, the passing of the seasons. Even the nature of time itself is woven into myth: Helios has 350 herds of cattle for each day of the year, the moon goddess Selene had 50 daughters to represent the 50 lunar months of the four-year Olympiad cycle - a Greek measurement of time. Not only were myths there to provide answers to unknown natural occurrences, but they also developed as the Greeks advanced themselves.

> Monsters were born from Echidna, who was half woman, half serpent. Her husband, Typhon, was a dragon with 100 heads

Whether the majority of Greeks thoroughly believed the explanations given in myths is up for debate. We do know that by the 6th century BCE, philosophers had become sceptical about the tales, seeking scientific, rational explanations for nature's curiosities. However, this did not slow the popularity of the myths, and this is likely because of the strong resonance the tales had for all of Greek society. Moral lessons form the basis of almost every Greek myth in some capacity and they were not written to entertain, but to serve as lessons and warnings.

It is interesting that Greek gods, unlike the deities of most religions, were flawed. The heart of the dramas are not tales of the divine but of real people; they fall in love, they get jealous, fight and make mistakes. For instance, Hera, the wife of Zeus, is shown as being spiteful and jealous because of her husband's affairs. However, the subject of her hate is not her cheating husband, but the women he cheats on her with. Aphrodite, the goddess of love, bribes Paris to name her the most beautiful goddess by promising him the most beautiful woman in the world as a prize. He does so and she gives him Helen, thus starting the Trojan War. These and many more myths are cautionary tales, advising the listener how to live their lives to avoid grisly fates. The tale of King Midas, who wishes for everything he touches to turn to gold, but then almost starves to death as a result symbolises the evils and dangers of greed. Hubris, the sin of excessive pride and arrogance, was a crucial moral concept to the Greeks. These tales warned the population against extremes, and emphasised the importance of moderation. This was the same society that believed that athletics and intellect should both feature equally in their competitions and games, and their myths demonstrate time and time again that anything done to excess will lead down the path of ill-fate.

Although modern admirers of Greek myth are typically more fascinated with the tales of gods and goddesses, the contemporary audience's favourites were by far from the age of heroes - where it is mortals who take centre stage, fight epic battles and, against all odds, achieve greatness. Many of these heroes like Heracles and Achilles bridge the gap between god and man

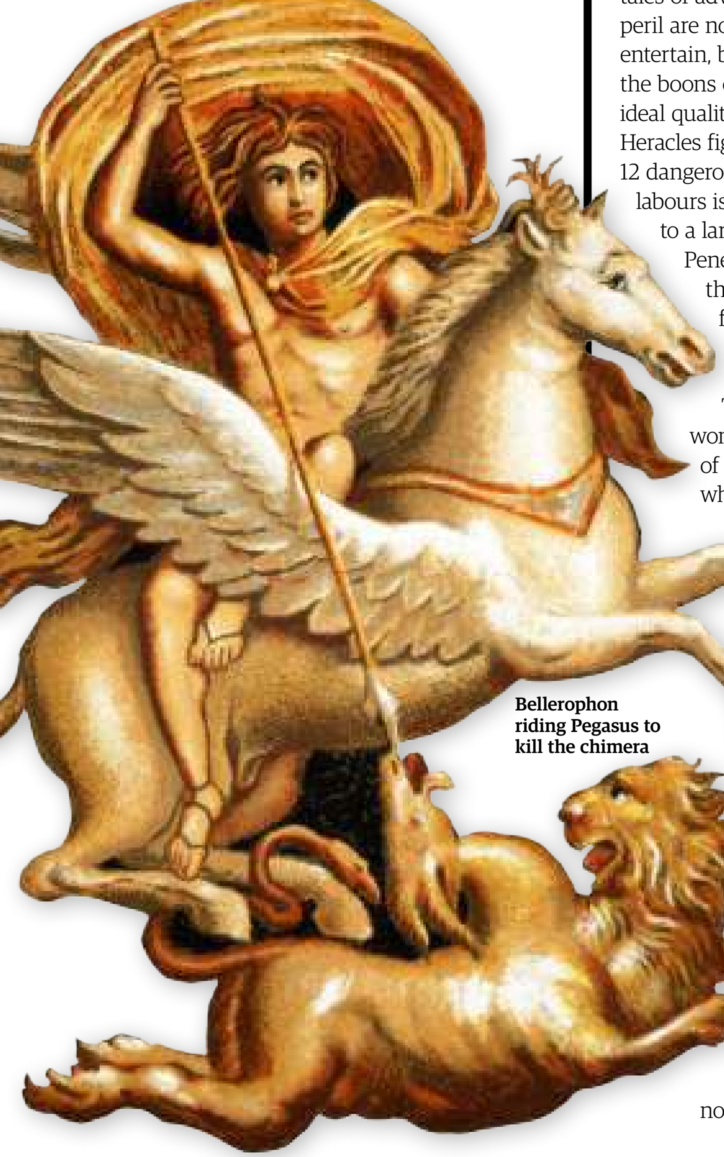
One of the most terrifying monsters was the sphinx, those who could not answer its tricky riddles were doomed to be eaten by it

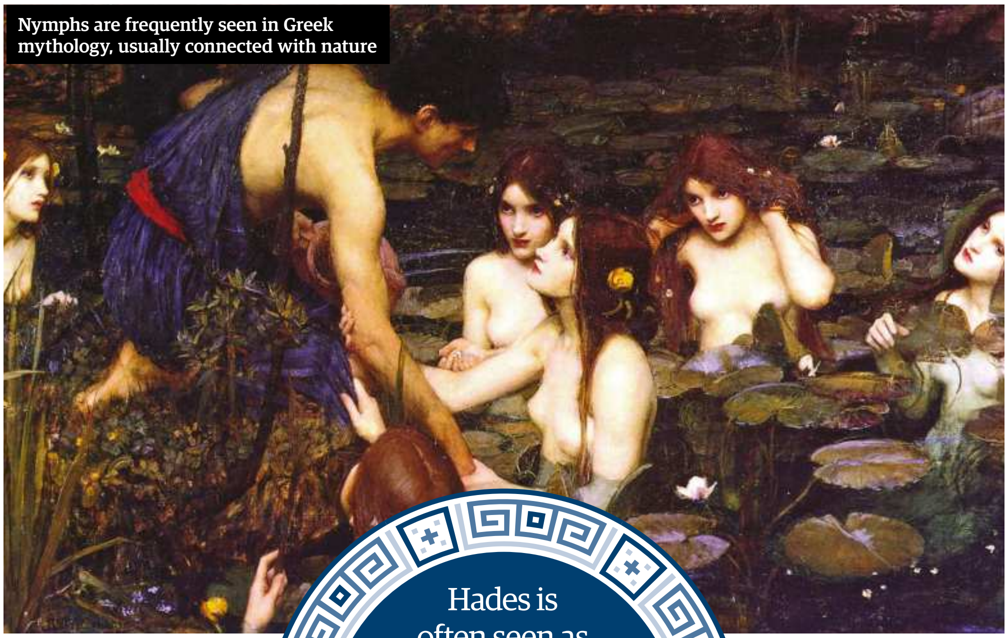
## Pegasus

Perhaps best known for his role in Disney's *Hercules*, Pegasus' story is a little darker than you might think. When the Gorgon Medusa was finally found and beheaded by the hero Perseus, a winged horse sprang forth from the blood - Pegasus was born. Alongside him was his brother, Chrysaor, who was usually depicted as a giant or a winged boar.

After his birth, not much is written about Pegasus' life until he comes under the care of Athena, the goddess who is known to have tamed and trained the beast. He resided in the grand stables of Mount Olympus alongside the steeds that pulled the chariots of Helios, Poseidon and Zeus himself. In fact, Zeus actually made use of Pegasus with the winged horse carrying his thunderbolts into battle.

The story that Pegasus is most associated with, however, is that of Bellerophon. The hero had been given the task of killing the fire-breathing Chimera and realised that it would be easier to do so from the air. After seeking advice from a seer and making a sacrifice, Pegasus appeared they rode to slay the chimera. Victorious after the battle, Bellerophon rode Pegasus to Olympus to see the gods but Zeus detested the presumptuous behaviour. He dispatched a fly that stung Pegasus and when the horse bucked, Bellerophon was unseated and fell to Earth.


Bellerophon riding Pegasus to kill the chimera


Nymphs are frequently seen in Greek mythology, usually connected with nature

as they have divine parents but mortal flaws. Their fantastic tales of adventure and peril are not simply to entertain, but to portray the boons of certain ideal qualities. The tale of Heracles fighting through 12 dangerous and daring labours is one of strength, but, to a larger degree, perseverance.

Penelope, the wife of Odysseus, displays the trait of fidelity as she dutifully waits for her husband to return from the war, rejecting her suitors until he returns and they live a long and happy life. This story sent a clear message to women particularly about the importance of loyalty to their spouses in a society where women were seen as 'belonging' to a man, and adultery was judged as worse than rape.

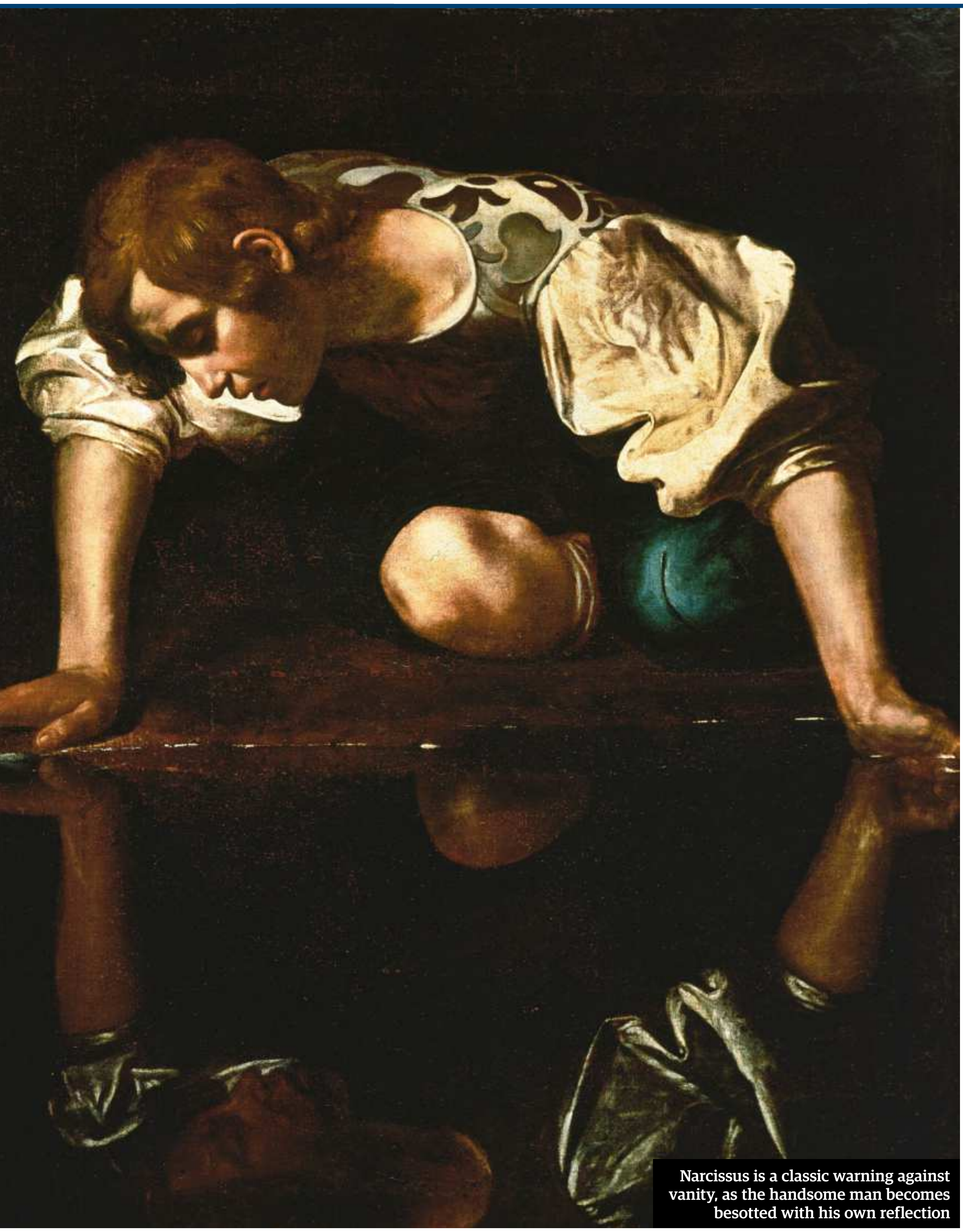
In many cases, the development and frequency of certain themes in Greek mythology increased alongside Ancient Greek customs. For example, at the same time that it became normal in society for older men to have a younger, male sexual companion, tales of relationships between male gods and male heroes became more prevalent. Eventually almost every major male god had their own adolescent male partner, such as Zeus and Ganymede. Previous myths that had no obvious relation to same-sex male relationships were retold in a new light, such as the heroes of the Trojan War, Achilles and Patroclus. While previously their close relationship had been portrayed as 'brothers in arms' by Homer, by the time poets Plato and Aeschylus retold the story, the two were lovers.

Hades is often seen as evil, but this isn't strictly true – he and Zeus are brothers, and drew lots to rule the lower and upper worlds

Greek society was not only influenced by myth, but myth also reacted to and was transformed by the changes in society – the two were intrinsically linked. A repeated feature of Greek mythology is the appearance of strange, terrifying and bizarre monsters. Odysseus faces a one-eyed Cyclops in his quest; Heracles must defeat a hydra with multiple heads; there's the Gorgon Medusa who can turn a man to stone with a look; and Cerberus, the monster guarding the gates of hell.

These fierce beasts are often more memorable than the heroes themselves, and their terrifying descriptions emphasise the difficulty of the tasks the heroes must overcome, and subsequently, their bravery and cunning in defeating them. Many of them are chaotic mixes of creatures, making them unnatural and terrifying. A prime example is the Chimera, a fire-breathing monstrosity with the head and body of a lion, head of a goat and a snake's tail. It represents chaos and lack of reason, and by defeating them the heroes maintained the natural order of things. This, again, has echoes in Greek society, where law and order was valued highly with the creation of the Draconian constitution, and those who upset the order of society, or went against it were treated harshly, with the punishment of either exile or death.

Another explanation for the presence of these terrible creatures is that they represented the



Narcissus is a classic warning against vanity, as the handsome man becomes besotted with his own reflection

unknown world beyond Ancient Greek knowledge. The unfamiliar, and perhaps alarming, things that travelling Greeks experienced could explain some of the bizarre but somewhat recognisable features of myths. The huge, sprawling palace of King Minos in Crete may have come across to a visiting Greek as a labyrinth.

Bull-leaping and the worship of bulls in general was also rampant in Crete, which could explain the bull-like Minotaur that was encased within the maze. It seems more than a coincidence that in the tale the person who is charged with fighting this beast is a visiting Athenian. These creatures frequently lay on distant lands, like the Sirens who reside on small islands, beckoning sailors to their doom. It would make sense that a society that was just exploring the vast world outside would view it as one filled with danger and strange sights, and this was portrayed through myths.

Whether the Greek people regarded it as fact, legend or simply stories, Greek myth permeated every part of life. Not only did it inspire art, sculpture and poetry, but it also served as important life lessons and warnings for the people of Ancient Greece. Society and myth were intrinsically intertwined as when one was developed it inevitably affected the other. In this way, whether based on true events or not, Greek mythology can tell us much about the culture that created it, the questions the people had, their view of the world, their values and the development of their own society.

## Scylla

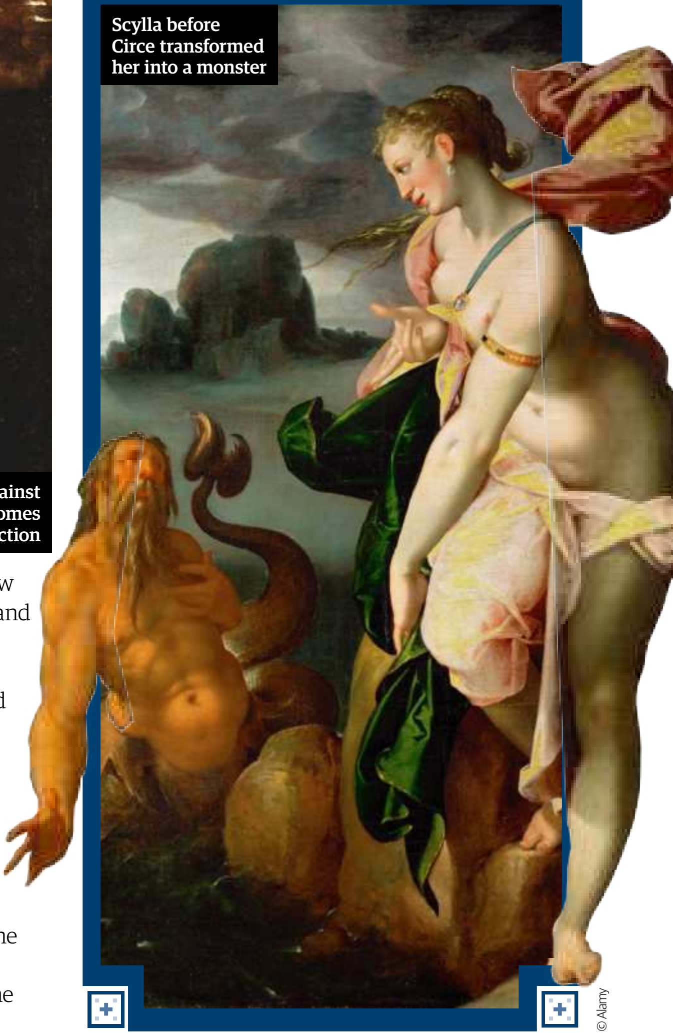
Beware sailing around ancient Greece for you could come across the sea monster Scylla and the nearby whirlpool known as Charybdis. With 12 dangling feet, six heads and three rows of sharp teeth, Scylla was not be trifled with. Homer describes hervoice as that of yelping dogs but she wasn't always so unsightly.

According to later writers in antiquity, Scylla was once a beautiful nymph who enjoyed attention and adoration from Glaukos, a sea-god. But good things don't tend to last in mythology. Scylla had a jealous rival, Circe, and it was she who turned Scylla into the monster that she has become infamous as. However, earlier writers disagree. They refer to her just as a monster who was born into a monstrous family.

Scylla is probably most famous from her depiction in Homer's Oddysey. It's in Book 12 that the hero Odysseus is warned that Scylla lives inside a cave, yelping. "No one could see her and still be happy," he says "Sunk waist-deep in the cave's recesses, she still darts out her head from that frightening hollow." He goes on to explain that no one has sailed that way and continued unharmed as "she snatches and carries off a man from the dark-prowed ship" – and it's one man for each of her six heads.

But Scylla spelled trouble for more than Odysseus. She troubled Jason and his Argonauts and she worried Aeneas but her final days would come. Heracles was given the task of slaying her and thankfully he succeeded.

Scylla before Circe transformed her into a monster



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# THE LESSONS OF GREEK MYTHS

Many Greek myths contained moral messages and lessons that the Greeks were wise to heed

The world of the Ancient Greeks was suffused with gods and goddesses of all kinds. Some were kind, others were cruel, but almost all were beyond the ability of mortal men to fully understand. They could also be wildly unpredictable and they could take offence easily.

Mortals who angered or displeased the gods could find themselves on the receiving end of extremely cruel punishments. When the hunter Actaeon, in the company of his hounds, accidentally chanced upon the virgin goddess Artemis while she was bathing nude, the deity turned the unfortunate man into a stag. He was promptly set upon by his beloved dogs, who tore him apart.

The myths of the Greeks helped them to make sense of the world around them. Some told of how the world came to be, while others explained the origin of gods and humans. Still more explained nature's seasons and the endless cycle of birth, life, death and rebirth of the year. Some contained memories of historical events, though much distorted with the passage of time, such as the story of the Trojan War, which most probably contains a kernel of truth about a half-remembered war fought in the Bronze Age.

Most myths didn't have the happy endings in the way that modern people would understand such things. The purposes of the stories were to instruct or to warn mortals away from dangerous behaviour. Very often these myths told mortals that they could never truly understand their immortal gods, and that usually they could hope only to navigate the vicissitudes of life as best they could. Fate was unavoidable, many myths demonstrated, and the mightiest efforts to avoid it often brought it to pass in unexpected ways.

## PERSEUS AND MEDUSA

### Be careful what you wish for - you might get it

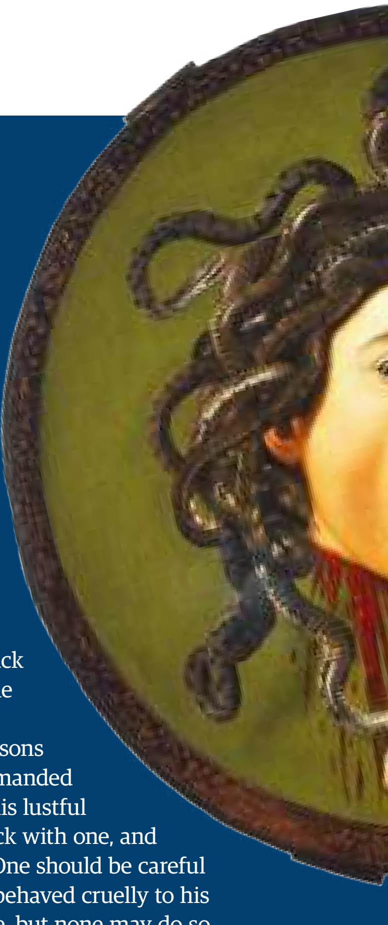
Danaë was the daughter of Acrisius, the king of Argos. Having no sons, Acrisius consulted the mystic Oracle of Apollo at Delphi. The response was an unhappy one for Acrisius. Not only would he have no sons; the son of his daughter would one day kill him. So he locked up his daughter in a bronze chamber beneath the earth, leaving only a small hole through which air and food might pass.

Zeus found her nonetheless. Turning himself into a shower of gold, he entered the chamber and made love to Danaë, who later gave birth to a son, named Perseus. One day, Acrisius heard the boy playing and discovered him. Enraged, the king placed his daughter and grandson into a wooden chest, which he then tossed into the sea. The mother and her son did not perish, as the king had expected, however. They were found by a fisherman named Dictys, and Perseus grew to manhood.

Polydectes was Dictys' brother and the king of Seriphos. Wanting Perseus out of the way so he could woo Danaë, for whom he lusted, he tricked Perseus into agreeing to bring him the head of a Gorgon. There were three of these sisters, all monstrous women. One of the Gorgons, Medusa, who had snakes for hair, turned all those who looked upon her to stone. Perseus found Medusa, and using his shield of burnished bronze to look upon her and avoid her direct, petrifying gaze, he struck off her head. He next used the head to save the beautiful princess Andromeda from a sea monster. He returned with his future bride to Seriphos and presented the Gorgon's head to Polydectes, as demanded. Polydectes was immediately turned to stone.

Perseus and Andromeda went to Argos, and Acrisius - still fearing death - ran away, but Perseus and Acrisius had a reconciliation. One day, Perseus threw a discus during an athletic competition, and it accidentally struck and killed his grandfather, just as the Oracle had foretold.

In this story, we see the moral lessons clearly. Polydectes had wickedly demanded a Gorgon's head so he could effect his lustful designs on Danaë. Perseus came back with one, and turned Polydectes to stone with it. One should be careful what one wishes for. Also, Acrisius behaved cruelly to his daughter and tried to escape his fate, but none may do so. In the end, he was killed by his grandson as foretold, despite his cruelty.



# HADES AND PERSEPHONE

## The abduction of Persephone, the daughter of Demeter, was an explanation for the seasons

Hades was brother to Zeus and Poseidon, and received the realm of the dead to be his domain. The Underworld thus also bore his name: Hades. One day, Hades spotted Persephone, the daughter of Zeus and Demeter, the goddess of nature, the harvest, and fertility. He wanted her to be his wife, but Zeus would neither allow it nor deny his request, knowing that Demeter herself would never agree to the union. So Hades abducted the girl and brought her to the Underworld.

Missing her daughter, and not knowing what had happened to her, Demeter went in search. She looked everywhere but could not find Persephone. The earth suffered from her wrath as she grew ever more desperate. Nothing would grow while Demeter was distraught. On the tenth day of her search, Demeter learned from the goddess Hecate that Persephone had been abducted, but she could not say by whom. Soon after, the god Helios told her that Hades had her. Demeter refused to allow a marriage to Hades. In retaliation for the kidnapping, she also refused to allow anything on earth to grow.

When the earth had been in the grip of famine for over year, Zeus knew something had to be done. He sent the god Hermes to retrieve Persephone. Hades agreed to let her go, but tricked her into eating a single pomegranate seed. Because she had eaten food in the Underworld, she would not be allowed to leave.

This did not please Demeter at all, but a deal was worked out among the gods. Persephone, having partaken of food in the Underworld, must reside there with Hades, as his queen, for three months out of the year, and for the rest may leave and go and live with her mother. For the Greeks, this myth explained the barrenness of the earth during winter, when nothing grew. Fertility returned only when Persephone departed Hades to live with her now-joyful mother, Demeter, for the other nine months.

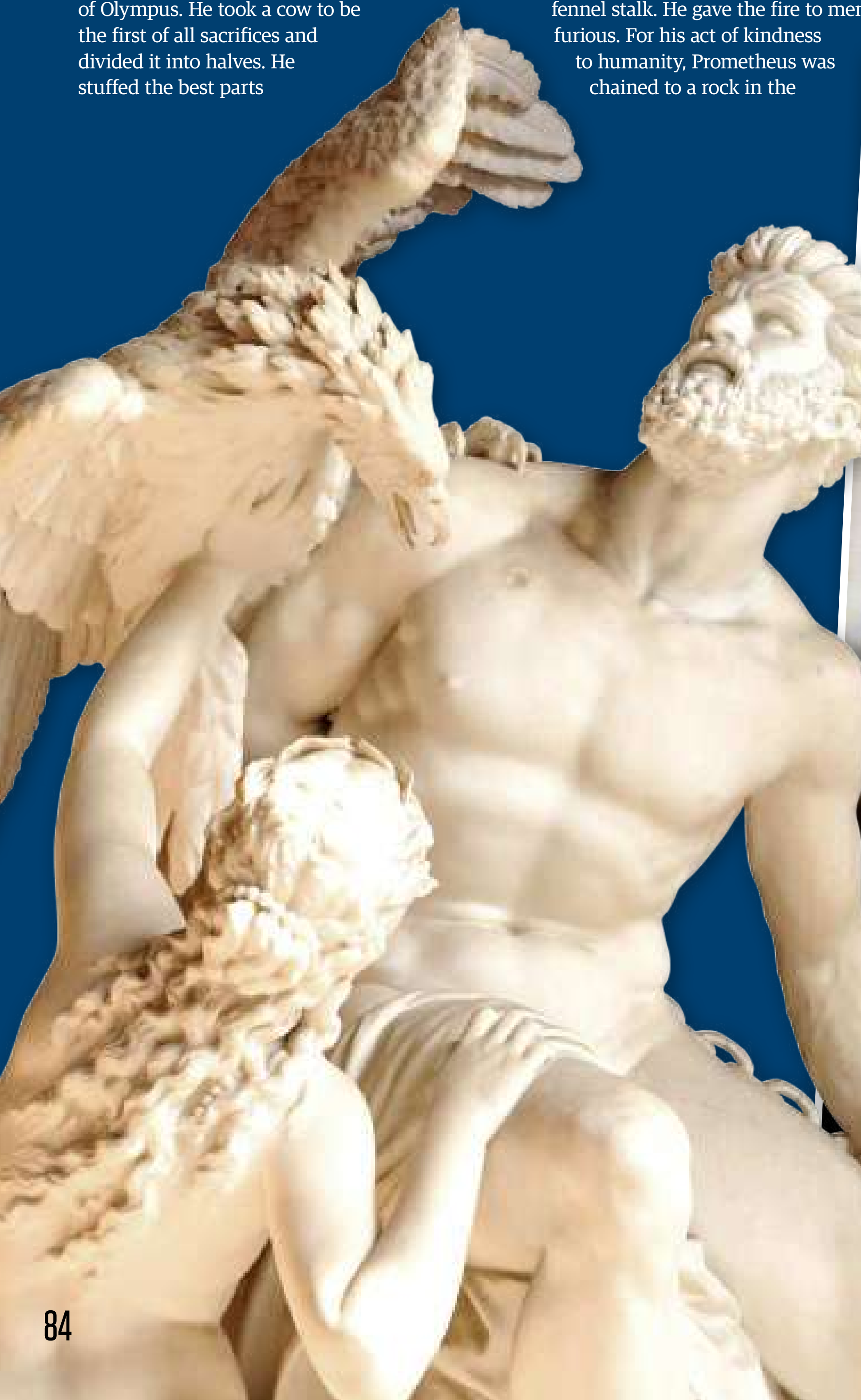
# PROMETHEUS: BRINGER OF FIRE

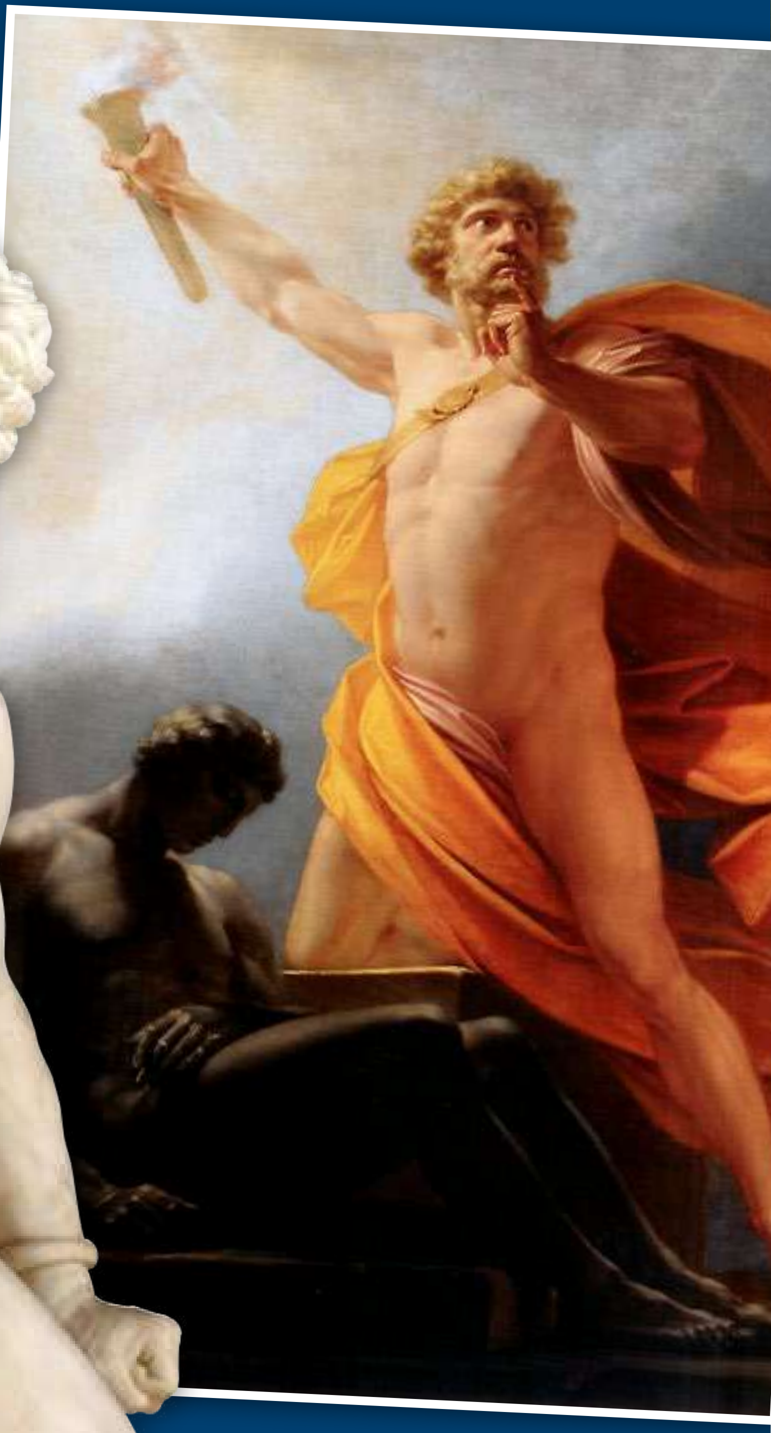
## The gift of fire to men came at a high price

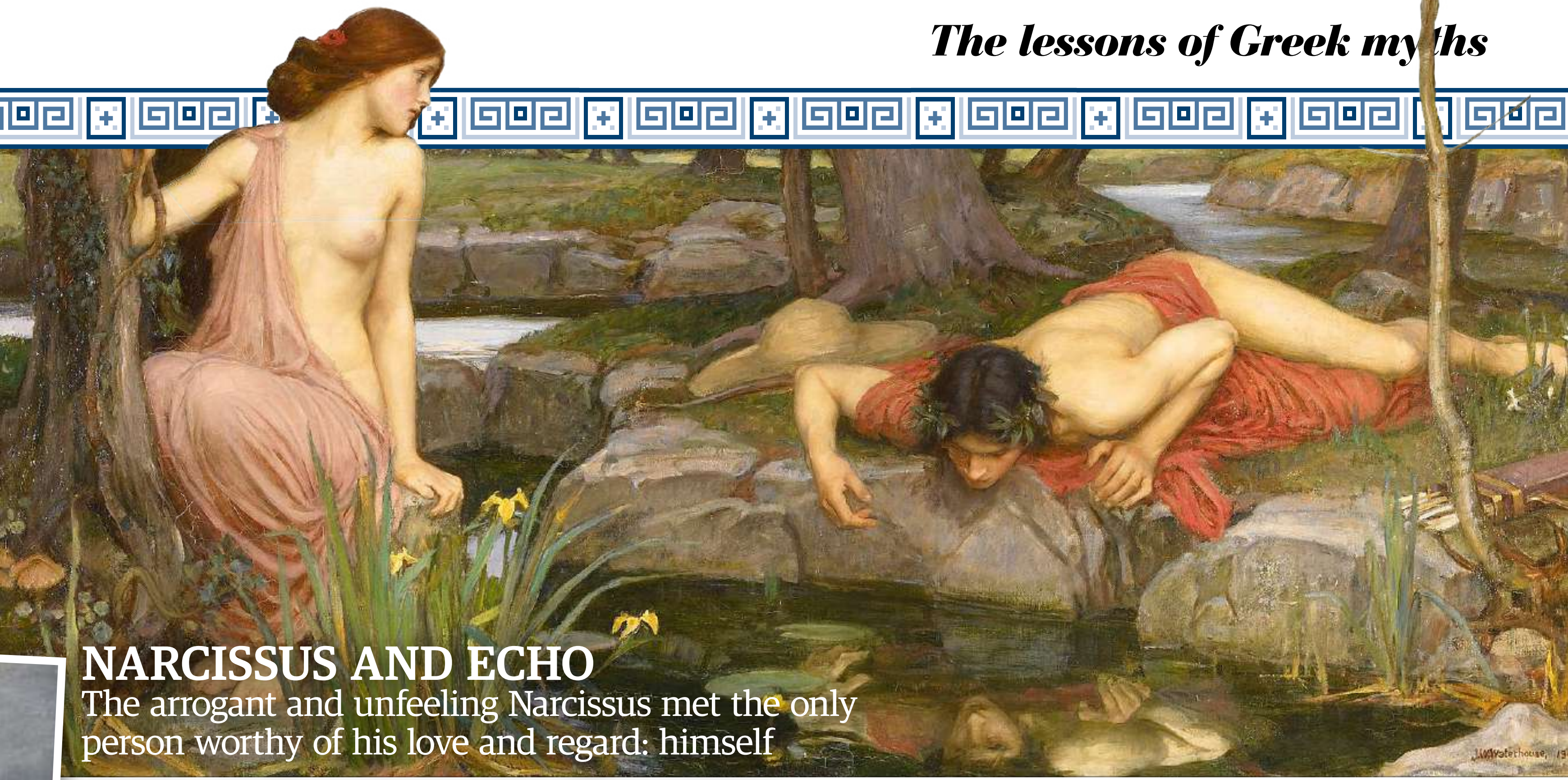
Prometheus was a Titan whose name meant 'forethought'. Wise and considerate of humans, who lived wretched lives, he taught them the ways of civilised life. He also showed them how to make animal sacrifices to secure what they needed from the gods. Zeus came down to negotiate with Prometheus about the nature of the sacrifices. In exchange for giving men fire, Zeus would receive the best parts of the sacrificial animal. But here, Prometheus played a trick on the king of the gods of Olympus. He took a cow to be the first of all sacrifices and divided it into halves. He stuffed the best parts into the animal's stomach. The bony remnants he covered in gleaming fat, and these were put into the cow's hide. Zeus passed over the unappetising stomach and picked the hide, thinking it was the better of the two.

When Zeus realised he had been tricked, he refused to allow men to keep fire. Without fire, men could not cook, heat their homes, bake pottery, or smelt metals. Prometheus went to Hephaestus' forge and stole fire, hiding it in a fennel stalk. He gave the fire to men but Zeus was furious. For his act of kindness to humanity, Prometheus was chained to a rock in the Caucasus Mountains. Each day, an enormous eagle was sent by Zeus to rip out his liver with its beak. As an immortal Titan, he could not perish, and also, each time, his liver grew back, allowing the torment to continue the next day.

Prometheus' story explained to the Greeks why sacrifices were necessary, and which portions were theirs and which should be offered up as smoke to the gods. It told them from where the arts of civilisation had come from. The Titan's unpleasant fate also demonstrated that defiance of Zeus comes at a terrible cost.







# NARCISSUS AND ECHO

## The arrogant and unfeeling Narcissus met the only person worthy of his love and regard: himself

Narcissus was an extremely handsome youth. When he was an infant, the seer Teiresias prophesied that he would live a long life, but only if he never knew himself. The meaning of this prophecy only became clear years later. One day, Narcissus was in the woods, out hunting. The youngster was heartless and vain and spurned all those who were interested in him.

On this day, a nymph saw him. Her name was Echo, and she had been cursed by Hera. Echo had covered for Zeus, Hera's husband, while he was out philandering. Hera discovered that the nymph had tricked her, and now Echo could only repeat the words spoken to her. Instantly in love, she approached Narcissus but could only repeat what he said first. Narcissus as yet could not see her. "Let us come together," he said. "Let us come together," she said back. She came out to greet him, but Narcissus rudely thrust her away. "I would rather die than allow you to make love to me!" the vain hunter snapped, to which Echo could only reply: "Make love to me!" Narcissus stalked off, leaving Echo alone. Still deeply in love, she pined away until she had disappeared completely, leaving only her voice behind. She had literally become an echo.

Still immensely arrogant, Narcissus sat down beside a mirror-like pool of water. He had never seen his reflection before, and looking into the pool, he did not recognise the youth looking back at him. He fell in love with his own reflection. Each time he reached for the other youth, he disturbed the water and the other man seemed to disappear. Narcissus had finally found someone worthy of his love: himself. Like Echo, Narcissus pined away in hopeless love and died beside the pool. The story of Narcissus and Echo showed the damage that excessive vanity and self-love, what today is called 'narcissism', can have.

# ODYSSEUS AND THE CYCLOPS

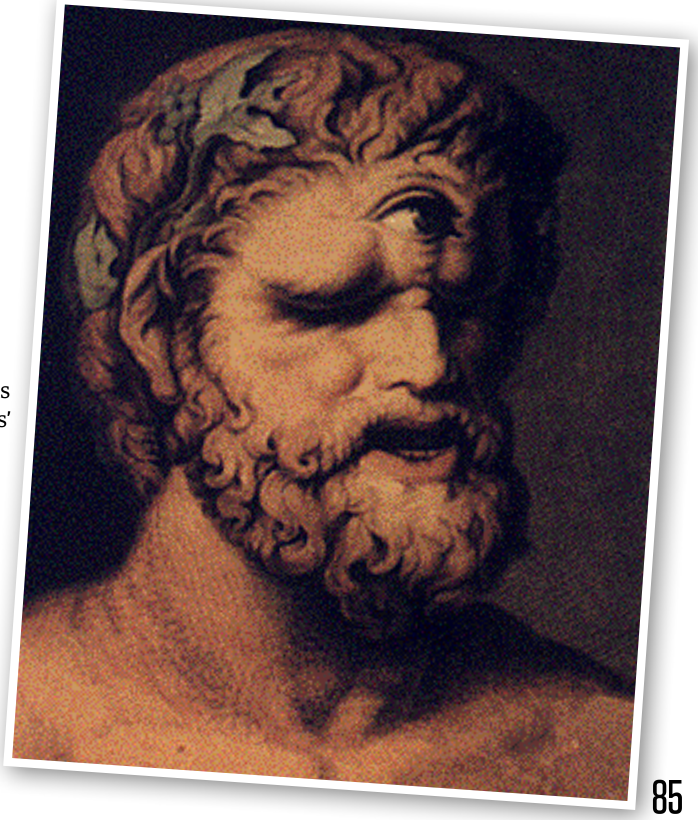
## The power of cleverness and guile

Crafty Odysseus conceived of the Trojan Horse, with which Troy was at last seized after a ten-year war. After the city had fallen, it was high time for him to return home, to the island of Ithaca where he was king. He and his men took to their ship and came upon an island where they found flocks of sheep and goats. They hunted the goats and later found a cave. No one was inside, though it was clear that someone lived within it. Inside there were also many sheep. Soon after, the inhabitant of the cave returned home. It was a Cyclops – a giant with just a single eye set in its face.

His name was Polyphemus and he brought with him other sheep. With his entire flock now inside the cave, he pushed a boulder in front of the entrance. This kept the sheep in, but also trapped Odysseus and his men. Polyphemus discovered the Greeks and began to eat them. The next morning, the Cyclops, munched two more of the Greeks, took out his flock of sheep, and again blocked up the cave entrance with the boulder.

It was only a matter of time before Polyphemus devoured all of the remaining Greeks. They had to get out somehow. They found a long and thick piece of wood, and sharpened it into a stake. Then they hardened its point in a fire. When the Cyclops came back that evening, the Greeks charged him, several men holding aloft the enormous stake. They plunged it into Polyphemus' sole eye, blinding him.

They were still not free, since Polyphemus cleverly blocked the cave entrance with his body. The equally clever Odysseus hit upon a ruse. He tied his men to the Cyclops' sheep. As the animals passed by Polyphemus, heading outside, he rubbed them, but he felt only the wool of the sheep, not the men. In this way, they escaped from the cave of the Cyclops.



# ACHILLES, GREATEST OF HEROES

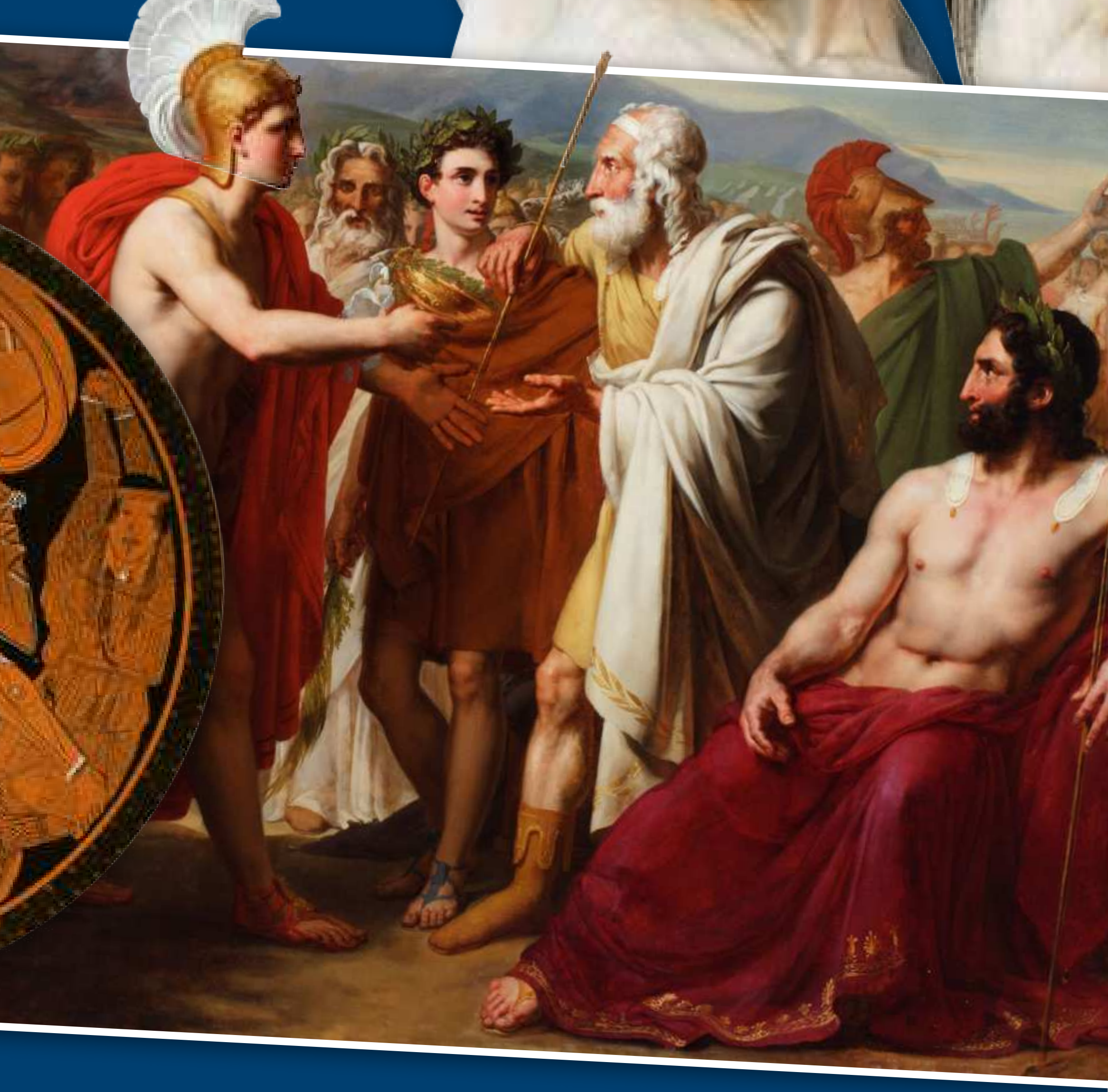
## The greatest warrior of the Greeks had a brief but glorious life that ended before the walls of Troy

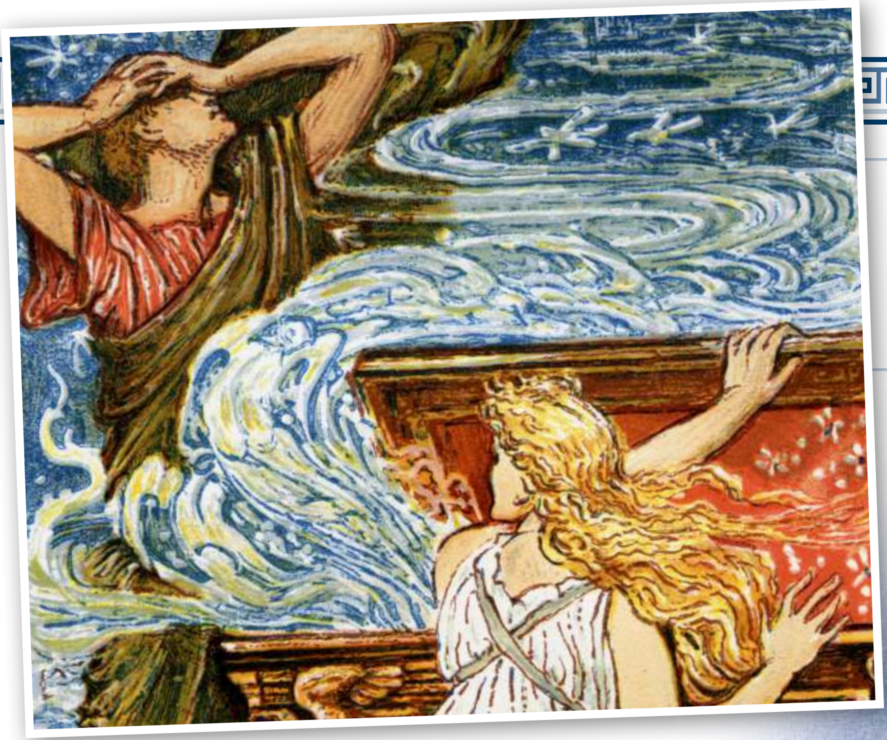
Achilles was the semi-divine son of the sea nymph Thetis and the mortal man Peleus. His fate was foretold: he would either live a long and uneventful life or have a very short but glorious one. His fearful mother dressed him as a girl and hid him among the daughters of King Lycomedes of Scyros. When the Greeks prepared to sail against Troy, they needed Achilles to go with them. Troy, another prophecy went, would not fall without Achilles present. Odysseus, the craftiest of the Greeks, devised a plan to uncover him. Going to the palace pretending to be a merchant, he set out his wares for the women, but also included weapons among them. He then blew a horn, as if danger threatened. Achilles grabbed the weapons, ready to fight. His disguise undone, he agreed to go to Troy and fight beside the other Greeks to recover Helen, who had been abducted by the Trojan prince, Paris.

At Troy he was the greatest of warriors on either side. The prideful hero removed himself from the war when Agamemnon, the leader of the Greeks, stole away his concubine, Briseis. The Greeks suffered and the Trojans recovered, gaining the upper hand in the war. Achilles adamantly refused to help the Greeks, coming back into the fight only when his best friend, Patroclus, was slain by the Trojan hero, Hector. After duelling Hector and killing him, the still-enraged Achilles dragged his corpse around the walls of Troy behind his chariot.

The grief-stricken Achilles eventually returned Hector's body to his father, King Priam of Troy, but only when the old man came in person to plead with him for it. Achilles himself perished when he was struck in the heel by an arrow launched by Paris.

The story of Achilles demonstrates that fate can't be avoided. It tells us also that anger and pride can be too great, leading to disaster.





"One day she opened it, and all of the evils that plague the world today came pouring out"

# PANDORA'S JAR

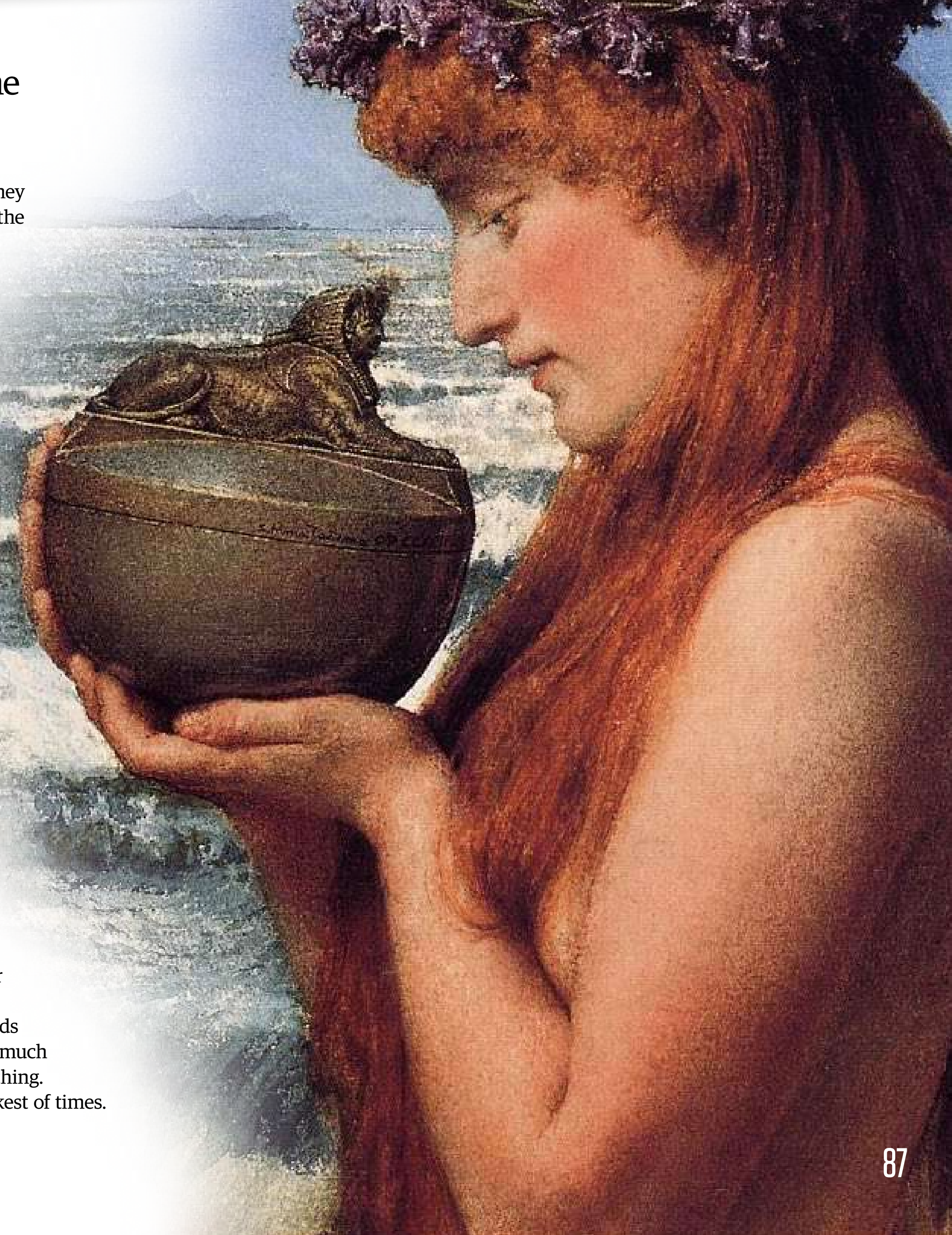
## The story of Pandora answers the timeless question as to why we suffer in this life

The gods did not want Men to become too powerful. They preferred that they remain ignorant and dependent on the gods. But the Titan Prometheus had given them many gifts, especially the gift of fire to help weak and vulnerable Man survive in a hostile world and make sacrifices to please the gods. Zeus was furious that Prometheus had done this, and had him punished savagely.

Humankind would not escape the wrath of the king of the gods either. At this time there were as yet no women in the world, only men. Zeus had Hephaestus, the divine smith of Olympus, fashion a living being out of clay to which each of the gods gave a great gift. Her name, Pandora, means 'all gifts' in Greek. Pandora was beautiful and graceful, and skilled at many things. The gods presented Pandora to the Titan Epimetheus, Prometheus' brother, to be his wife. Epimetheus, which means 'afterthought', accepted her unsuspectingly.

Pandora was a trap. She had been given a jar in which all evils imaginable were stored. She had been warned never to open the jar, and remained ignorant of what was inside. But being naturally curious, one day she opened it, and all of the evils that plague the world today, such as anger, lust, greed, envy and many others, came pouring out. Men, who had been living well, now struggled to survive in a grim new world. Inside the jar, only hope remained behind, so that Men might look for better days to come.

This myth conveys the lesson that defiance of the gods will be harshly punished. It also demonstrates that too much curiosity, heedless of consequences, can be a very bad thing. Finally, it shows that hope may endure even in the darkest of times.



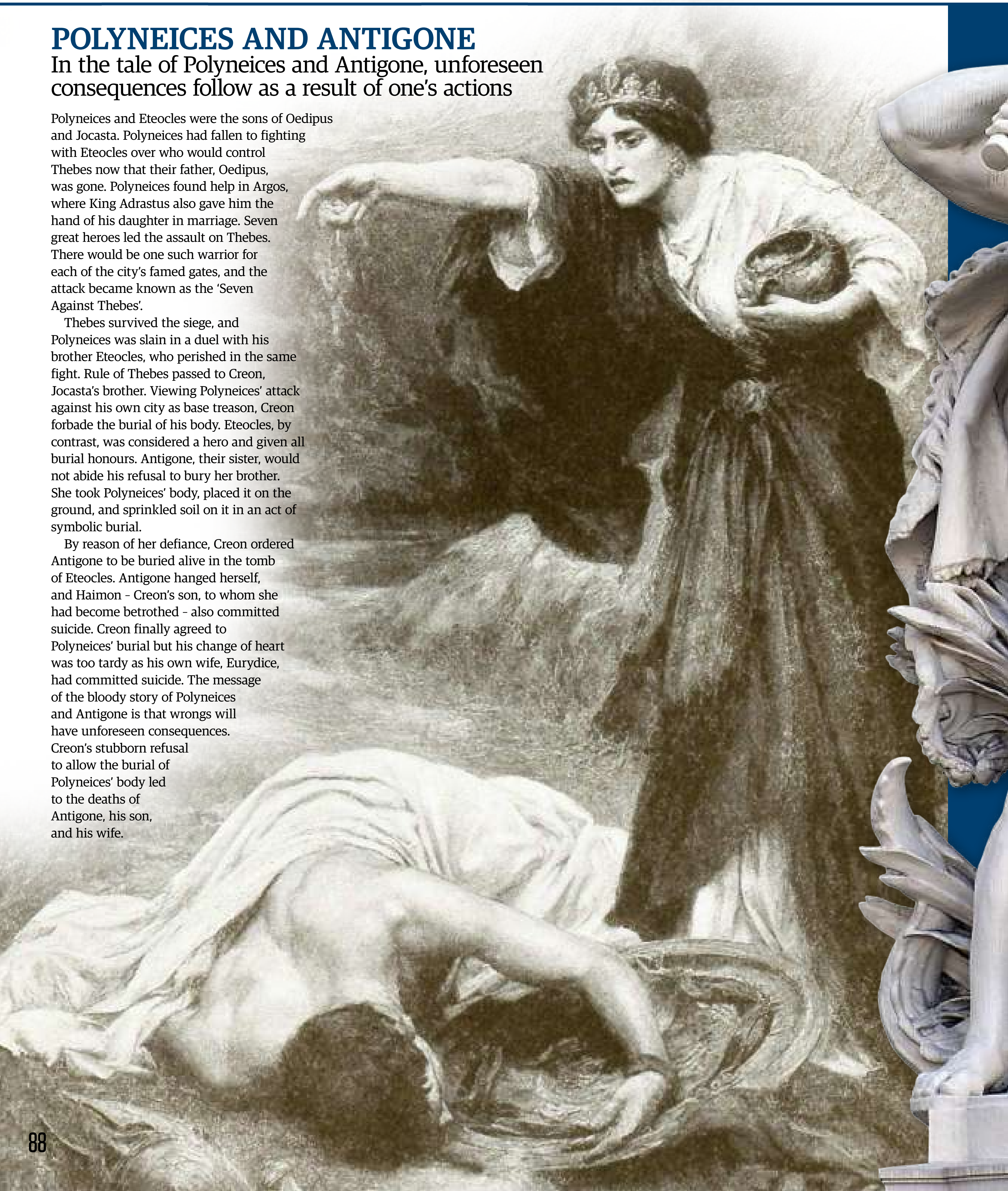
# POLYNEICES AND ANTIGONE

## In the tale of Polyneices and Antigone, unforeseen consequences follow as a result of one's actions

Polyneices and Eteocles were the sons of Oedipus and Jocasta. Polyneices had fallen to fighting with Eteocles over who would control Thebes now that their father, Oedipus, was gone. Polyneices found help in Argos, where King Adrastus also gave him the hand of his daughter in marriage. Seven great heroes led the assault on Thebes. There would be one such warrior for each of the city's famed gates, and the attack became known as the 'Seven Against Thebes'.

Thebes survived the siege, and Polyneices was slain in a duel with his brother Eteocles, who perished in the same fight. Rule of Thebes passed to Creon, Jocasta's brother. Viewing Polyneices' attack against his own city as base treason, Creon forbade the burial of his body. Eteocles, by contrast, was considered a hero and given all burial honours. Antigone, their sister, would not abide his refusal to bury her brother. She took Polyneices' body, placed it on the ground, and sprinkled soil on it in an act of symbolic burial.

By reason of her defiance, Creon ordered Antigone to be buried alive in the tomb of Eteocles. Antigone hanged herself, and Haimon – Creon's son, to whom she had become betrothed – also committed suicide. Creon finally agreed to Polyneices' burial but his change of heart was too tardy as his own wife, Eurydice, had committed suicide. The message of the bloody story of Polyneices and Antigone is that wrongs will have unforeseen consequences. Creon's stubborn refusal to allow the burial of Polyneices' body led to the deaths of Antigone, his son, and his wife.



# HERACLES

## The hot-tempered son of Zeus ranged far and wide over the world, performing heroic deeds, and gained a place among the gods

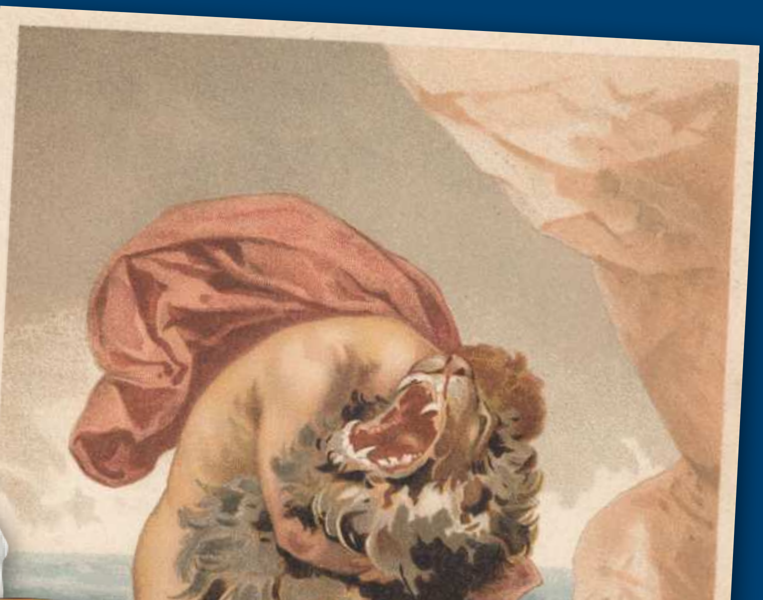
The mighty Heracles was gifted with enormous strength. As a son of Zeus by the mortal woman Alcmene, he was semi-divine. He also suffered the hatred of Zeus's jealous wife Hera, the queen of the gods, who fiercely resented her husband's cheating ways. So angry was Hera that she sent two venomous snakes to kill the infant Heracles in his cradle. Baby Heracles was so strong and brave that he strangled them both.

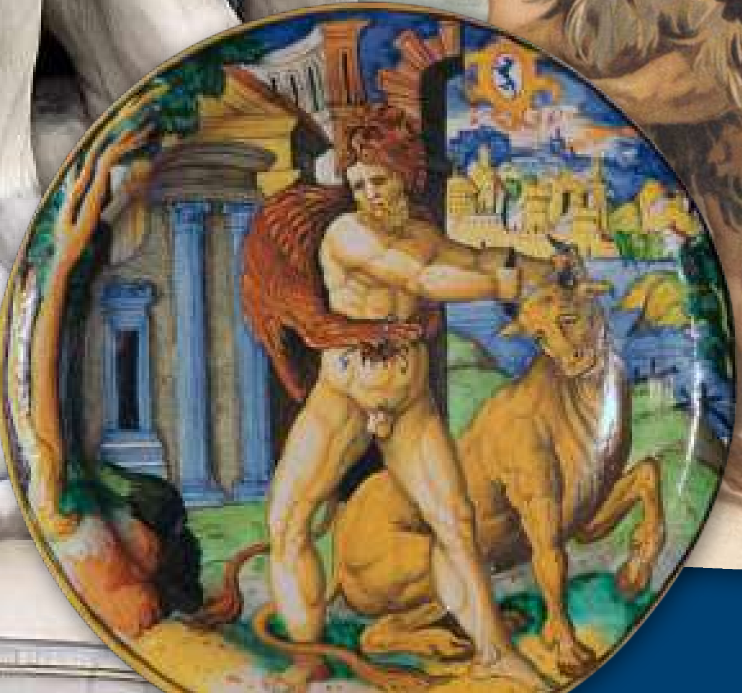
Heracles was tutored by Chiron the wise centaur, as well as other estimable instructors. But Heracles had a terrible temper, killing his lyre-tutor Linus in a fit of rage when he was criticised and struck by the man.

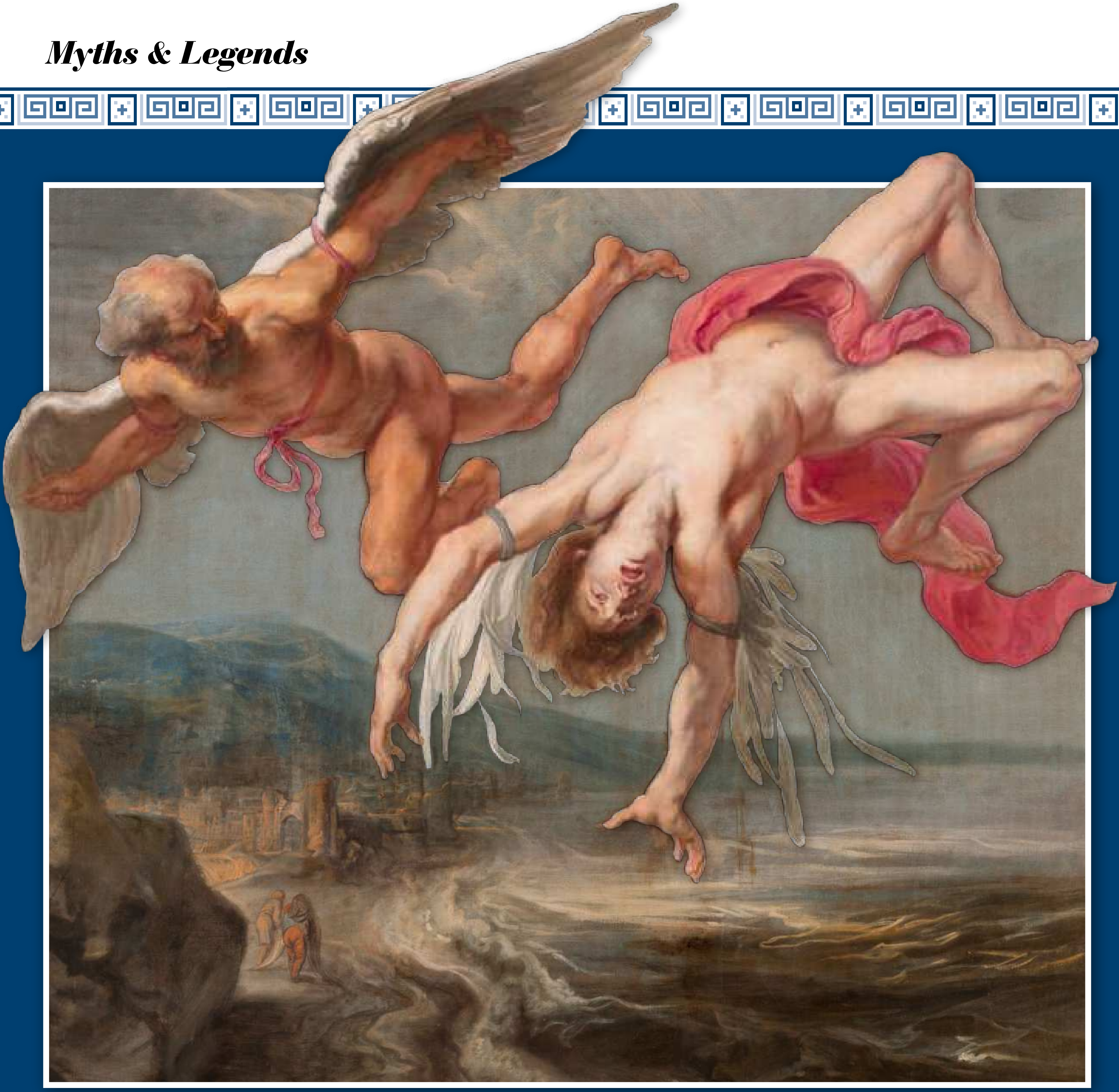
Heracles was also a prodigy in the bedroom, lying with 49 out of King Thespius of Thespia's 50 daughters in a single night. He got them all pregnant too. Hera's jealousy found him, however. The goddess caused Heracles to go mad, and he killed all of the children he had sired with Thespius's daughters.

To expiate his grievous sins, Heracles was forced to serve a man who was weaker than himself. This was Eurystheus, who set him to perform 12 great labours. These included the slaying of the Nemean lion; the killing of the Lernaean Hydra, a beast with many heads that grew back even when severed; the cleaning of the filth-filled Augean stables; the hunting and capture of the Erymanthian boar; and several others.

Heracles also took part in the quest for the Golden Fleece as a crewmember of the Argo, and would eventually gain full immortality and take his place on Olympus. The meaning of the Heracles story is that a mortal could gain immortality through the many and awesome deeds he performed on Earth.







# DAEDALUS AND ICARUS

## The inventive Daedalus devised a means of escape from the Labyrinth, but his son Icarus failed to heed his warning not to fly too close to the sun

Daedalus was a great artisan, inventing many useful things such as the axe and the sail. He took service with King Minos of Crete. Minos's queen, Pasiphae, had the skilled Daedalus devise a wooden cow in which she could hide so that she could have sexual intercourse with a bull. Her husband then asked Minos to devise the Labyrinth, an inescapable maze in which to imprison the bull-headed son, the Minotaur, that Pasiphae had as a result of her mating with the bull.

As punishment for building the wooden cow that Pasiphae had used, Daedalus and his son Icarus were also imprisoned in the Labyrinth. But the cunning Daedalus had a brilliant idea. Using bird feathers and wax, he fashioned wings for both himself and his son. They took flight and escaped the Labyrinth.

Daedalus had warned his son not to fly too close to the sun, fearing that the heat would melt the wax that held the wings together. Icarus forgot his father's instruction and flew ever closer, delighted to be flying. Soon the wax had melted and the wings came undone. Icarus fell to his death in the sea near to the island of Samos. The story of Daedalus and Icarus is a warning to beware of overreach, and of the need to listen to wiser counsel. Just as Icarus had flown too high, people should be careful not to go too far, lest danger claim them also.

# JOCASTA AND OEDIPUS

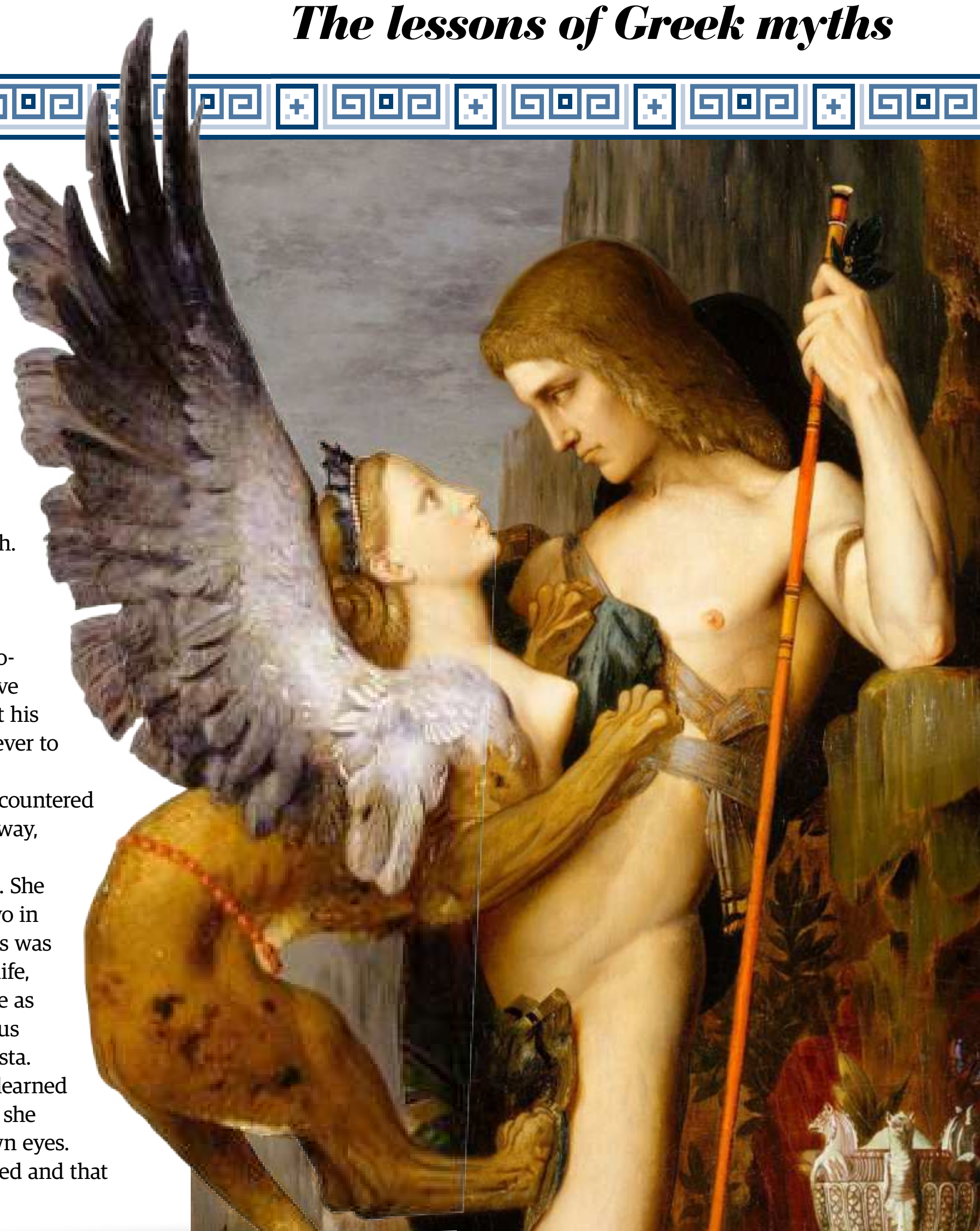
## Oedipus and his parents tried to avoid fate but wound up bringing it to fruition instead

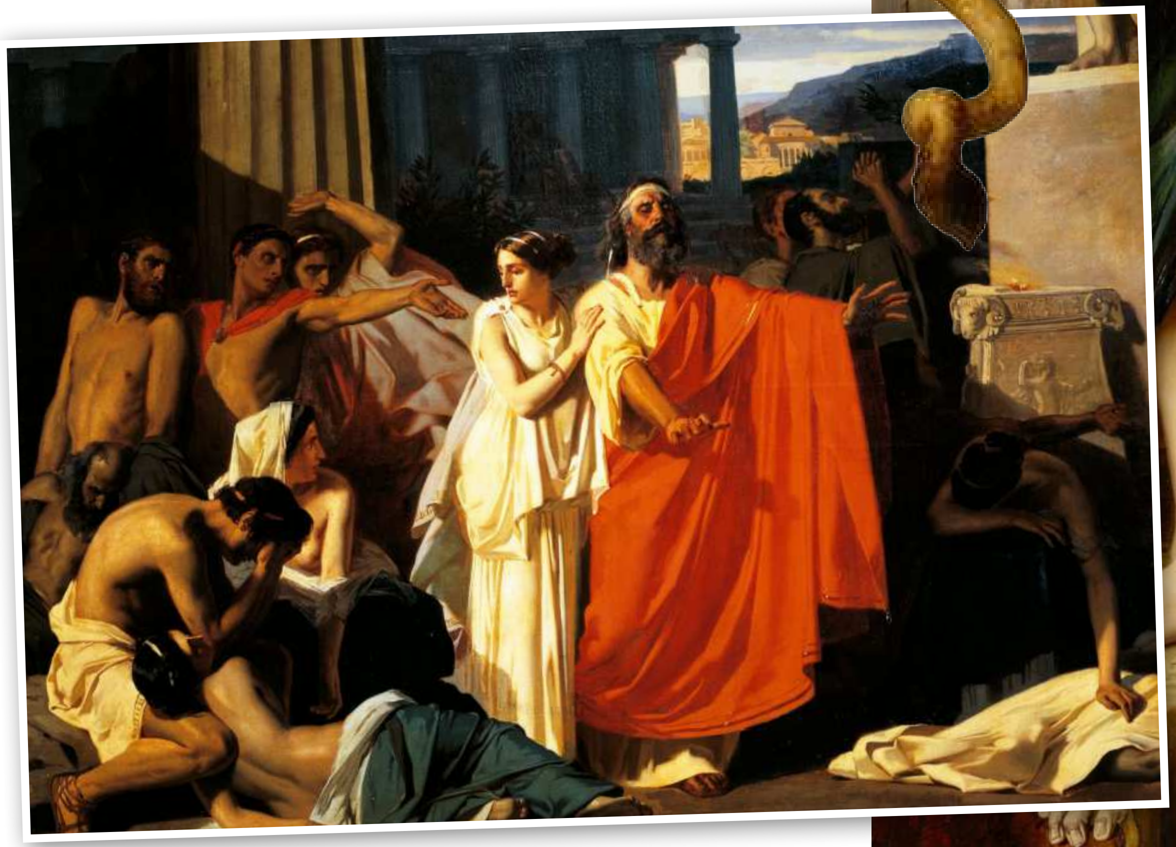
King Laius of Thebes and his wife Jocasta were warned by an oracle not to have a child together. That child would end up killing its father. Heedless of the warning, Jocasta became pregnant and gave birth to a boy. To avoid the awful prophecy, the unhappy parents gave the baby to a herdsman to expose in the wilderness. The herdsman took pity on the little child and gave it to another herdsman, who tended the royal flock of Corinth. Oedipus, as the boy was named, was raised as the son of the childless King Polybus and Merope of Corinth.

One day, Oedipus was mocked for not being the real son of his parents. He consulted the Oracle at Delphi and received a dire, two-part prophecy. Not only would he kill his father; he would also have sexual relations with his own mother. Since Oedipus believed that his parents were none other than Polybus and Merope, he resolved never to return to Corinth.

He found himself on the road leading away from Delphi and encountered Laius, his true father. When Laius refused to get out of Oedipus's way, he killed him, thus fulfilling part of the prophecy. Next, Oedipus encountered the Sphinx, a winged lion with the head of a woman. She asked him a riddle: "What goes on four feet in the morning, on two in the day, and on three at night?" Oedipus answered correctly that is was man himself. He crawls on four as a baby in the beginning of his life, walks on two legs as an adult, and then three when he uses a cane as an old man. For answering the riddle, Oedipus received the dubious reward of marriage to Laius's widow, his own mother, Queen Jocasta.

He had two sons and two daughters by Jocasta, but eventually learned the terrible truth of his parentage. Jocasta took her own life when she discovered who Oedipus was, and Oedipus himself put out his own eyes. The moral message of the awful tragedy is that fate can't be avoided and that the intentions of the gods are impossible for man to fathom.





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# BEASTS OF MYTH AND LEGEND

From the brutal Cyclopes to the cunning Sphinx, the monsters and beasts from Greek mythology still intrigue, amaze and terrify audiences to this day

Greek mythology is best known for its heroes; the brave and valiant men (and more rarely, women) who proved their strength and heroism through daring acts. However, in order for these heroes to shine they needed mighty foes to vanquish, and these came in the form of a myriad of legendary monsters.

The Greeks certainly did not go in by halves when creating these creatures of myth. The monsters which grace the pages, paintings and tales of Greek legend are among the most memorable and infamous in the entire literary canon. From Typhon, the god of all monsters and an utterly terrifying amalgamation of beasts, to the ravenous Sphinx who speaks only in riddles, Greek myths feature a cornucopia of beasts, spirits and dastardly demons eager to stop the heroes in their quests. While some of the legendary creatures could be helpful, such as the playful nymphs, most were ravenous, uncivilised monsters, such as Cerberus, the three-headed dog that guarded the depths of hell, and the lumbering but incredibly strong Cyclopes hunting men to consume.

These monsters played a vital role in myths and became so infamous that they developed beyond the stories where their legends began, permeating into ancient Greek culture and even being blamed as the source of natural disasters. These beasts were not simply mindless adversaries to be slain but rather came to represent the untamed, uncivilised and simply 'mad' aspects of the world. They were unreal creatures thrown unnaturally together, the stuff of nightmares and sleepless nights, and without these beasts presenting an imposing threat it is unlikely the famous heroes like Heracles and Theseus would have become the legends they did.

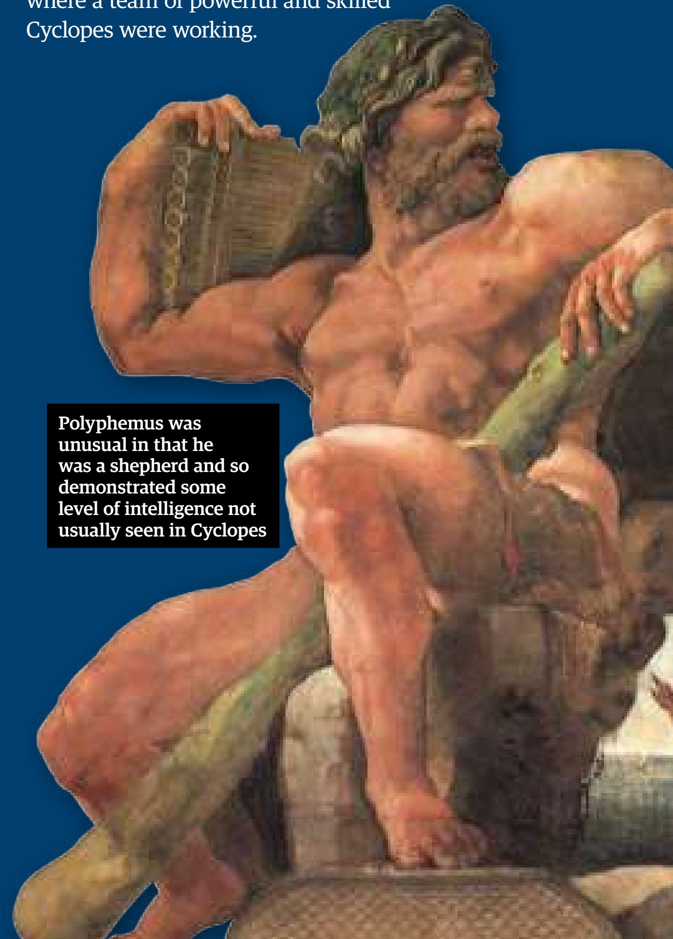
## CYCLOPES

### The greatest warrior of the Greeks had a brief but glorious life that ended before the walls of Troy

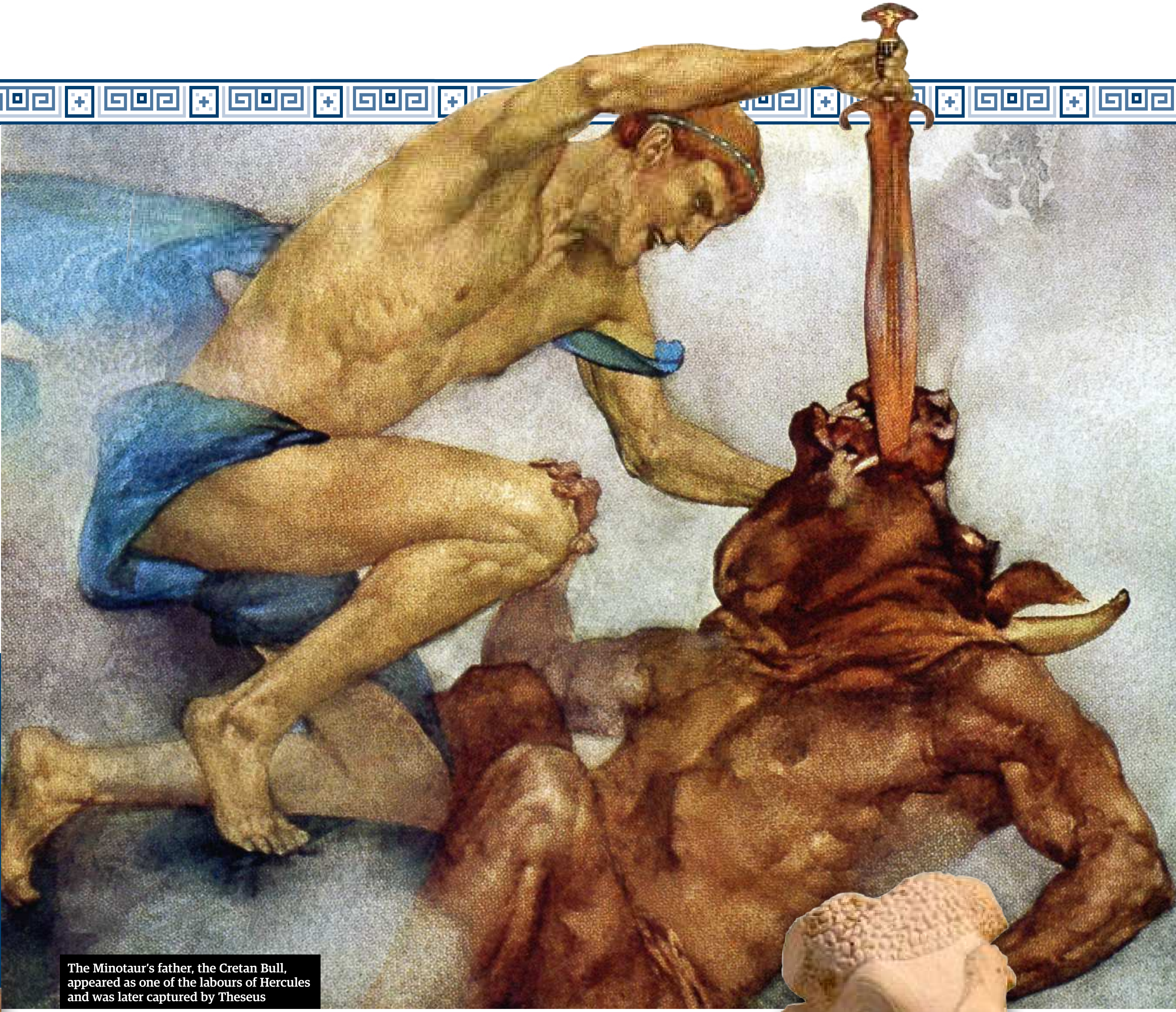
The Cyclopes were one of the most famous races in Greek myth and played prominent roles in many heroic tales. Depicted as huge lumbering beasts, Cyclopes are most known for their one giant eye, which resides in the centre of their forehead. Their wild, unkempt appearances match their nature, and they are often portrayed as uncivilised, brutish beasts. The Cyclopes were anti-social, unwilling to bend to the will of the gods as well as being lazy and violent.

In some versions of the myth the Cyclopes were the sons of the Titans Uranus and Gaia, but in Homer's famous tale the Cyclops Polyphemus was the son of Poseidon. Polyphemus is likely the most famous Cyclops of them all - depicted as a man-eating monster who was outwitted and blinded by Odysseus. By comparison Hesiod mentioned three Cylopes, Arges (thunderbolt), Steropes (lightning) and Brontes (thunder). These three Cyclopes were storm gods and talented smiths who fought with Zeus against the Titans. They later went on to become Zeus' workers at Mount Olympus, forming his famous thunderbolts.

The Cyclopes are an excellent example of how the Greeks rationalised the immense power of nature they observed but could not explain. They witnessed the seismic activity of the volcanoes around them, such as Etna, and attributed the ash and lava gushing forth as evidence that the god of fire, Hephaestus, had a workshop in the heart of the volcano where a team of powerful and skilled Cyclopes were working.



Polyphemus was unusual in that he was a shepherd and so demonstrated some level of intelligence not usually seen in Cyclopes



The Minotaur's father, the Cretan Bull, appeared as one of the labours of Hercules and was later captured by Theseus

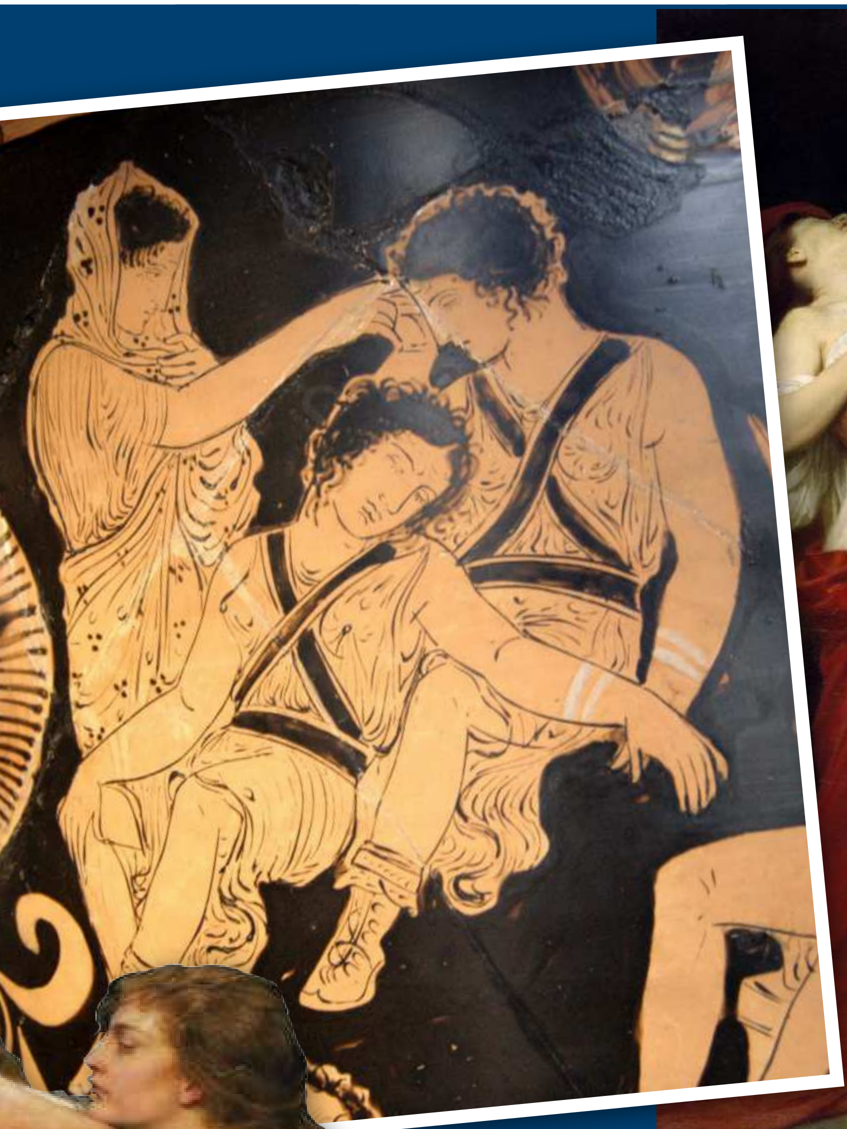
# MINOTAUR

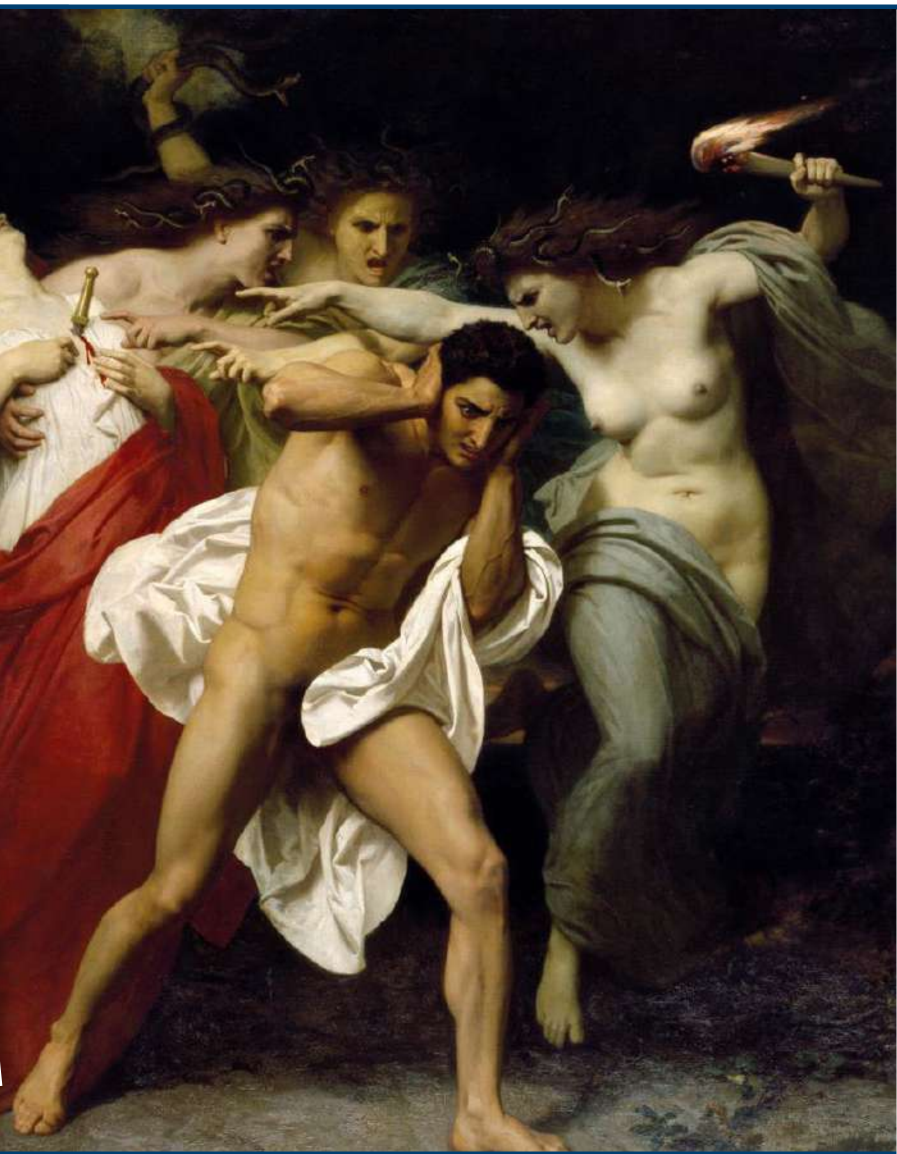
## The unholy union of woman and bull, the Minotaur was a curse placed upon a disobedient man by an unflinching god

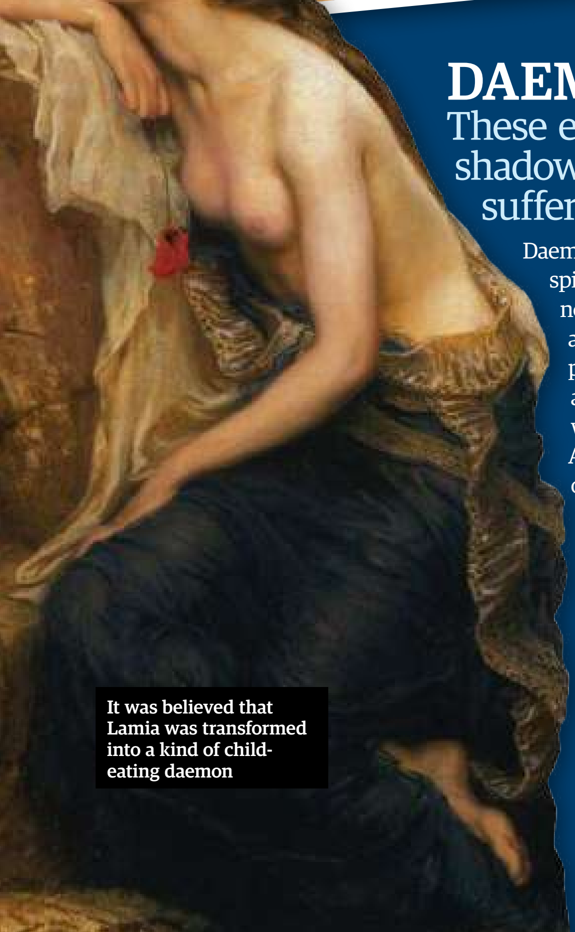
The origin of this legendary beast is one of the more unusual in Greek myth. Minos was struggling to become leader of Crete, and to show his support Poseidon sent Minos a white bull to sacrifice. Minos, impressed with the beauty of the bull, decided not to sacrifice it. Enraged by this disobedience, Poseidon made Minos' wife fall in love with the bull. Together they had a monstrous offspring – the Minotaur.

Reflecting its parents, the Minotaur was depicted as a half-man, half-bull beast, usually with the head and tail of a bull and the body of a man. The bull grew dangerous and fearsome as it aged and was only able to consume humans for nourishment. Minos consulted the oracle of Delphi for advice and under her instruction created a huge labyrinth under his palace. The Minotaur was placed at the centre, unable to escape and ravage innocents. However, when Minos' son was killed in Athens the king demanded that 14 youths be sent to Crete every year as sacrifices to the Minotaur.

Years later, the son of the king of Athens, Theseus, decided to try and defeat the beast. Gaining the affections of Minos' daughter, Ariadne, Theseus was given a sword and a ball of thread. He unravelled the thread as he explored the maze so he could find his way out later. When he reached the Minotaur he slayed the beast and then escaped the maze.







It was believed that Lamia was transformed into a kind of child-eating daemon

# DAEMON

## These ever-present forces kept themselves busy at work in the shadows, always ready to bestow riches on the good and pain and suffering upon any poor soul they did not favour

Daemons were believed to be semi-divine spirits that were born into existence when noble or semi-divine people passed away. Hesiod's myth said that great and powerful people were to be honoured after death by becoming a daemon. It was believed that during the 'Golden Age', ruled over by Cronus, a golden race of men were created, that, although mortal, lived like gods. When one of these men passed away they became a daemon and helped rule civilisation and watch over the Earth.

When Zeus took control he brought with him his own race of daemons that would report to the gods if they witnessed unjust acts. They would also reward kind or modest behaviour with rewards such as a rich harvest.

Zeus' daemons were not simply benevolent watchers of humanity, but also cruel and malevolent spirits known as kakodaimons. These devilish entities were known to abuse their power over humanity, whispering lies into their victim's ears or inflicting unjust punishment. For example, Eurynomos was a daemon who resided in the Underworld and was believed to eat the flesh of rotting corpses, leaving only their bones behind. Another malevolent group of daemons was known as the Arae.

This all-female group were the spirits of curses, especially curses placed by the dead on those who had caused their death. They could bring disease, madness, hunger and death upon their victims. Although daemons did not often appear in Greek art or mythology with an outward appearance, their presence could often be felt, with them appearing to heroes in people's dreams or whispering messages directly into their minds.

# CENTAUR

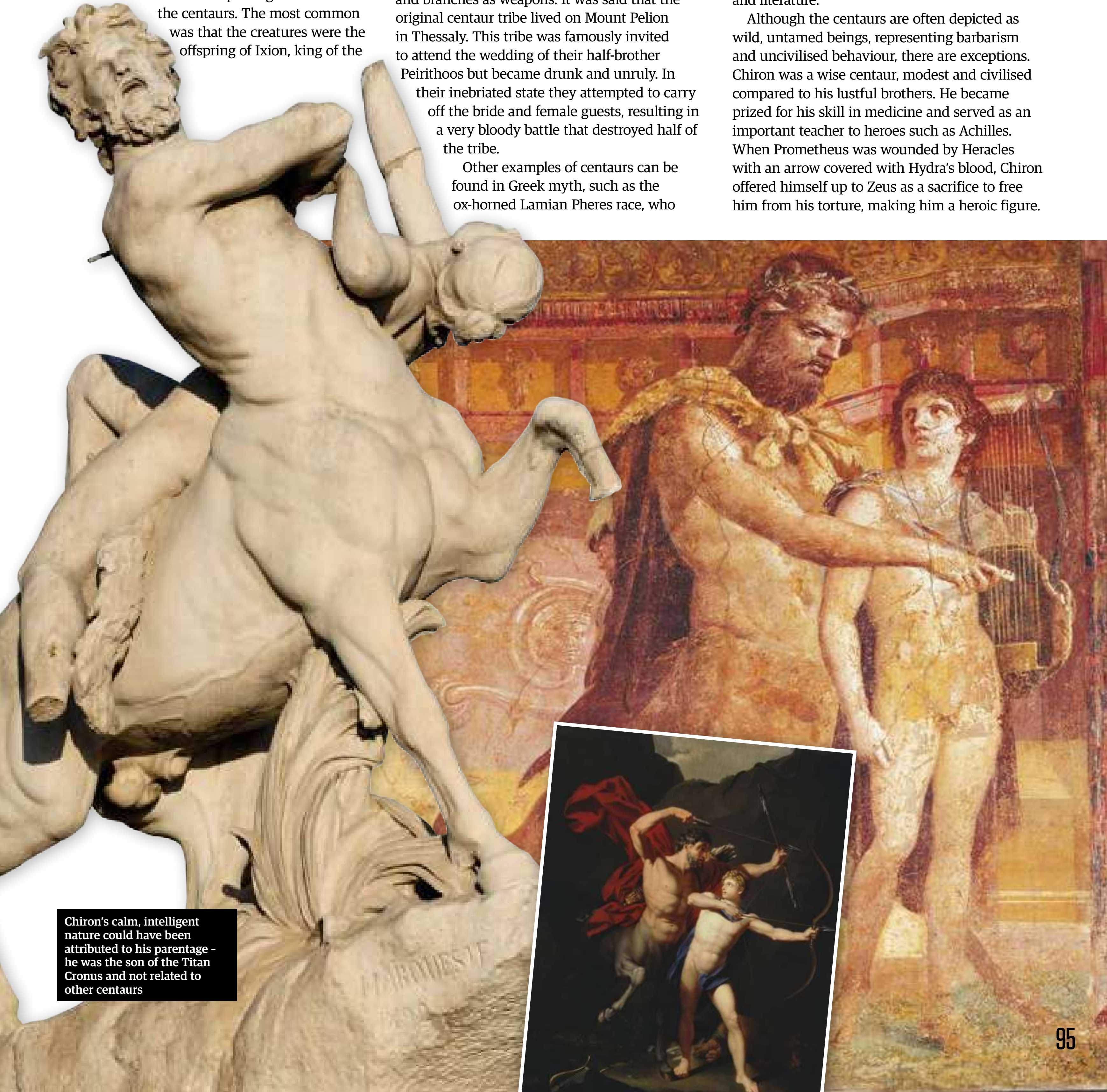
## Wild beasts, centaurs would roam in untamed tribes, dragging women away on lustful whims and savagely killing civilised men

The centaurs are among the most famous of Greek legendary beasts due to their continued and increased popularity in contemporary fantasy. Depicted as half-men, half-horse tribes, there were multiple origin stories for the centaurs. The most common was that the creatures were the offspring of Ixion, king of the Lapiths, and Nephele, who was a cloud created in the image of Hera.

The centaurs were usually depicted as a savage, primitive race who lived in caves and used rocks and branches as weapons. It was said that the original centaur tribe lived on Mount Pelion in Thessaly. This tribe was famously invited to attend the wedding of their half-brother Peirithoos but became drunk and unruly. In their inebriated state they attempted to carry off the bride and female guests, resulting in a very bloody battle that destroyed half of the tribe.

Other examples of centaurs can be found in Greek myth, such as the ox-horned Lamian Pheres race, who were given their horns as a punishment by the goddess Hera for guarding Dionysus on Zeus' orders. There was even a race of female centaurs, though they appeared far later in classical art and literature.

Although the centaurs are often depicted as wild, untamed beings, representing barbarism and uncivilised behaviour, there are exceptions. Chiron was a wise centaur, modest and civilised compared to his lustful brothers. He became prized for his skill in medicine and served as an important teacher to heroes such as Achilles. When Prometheus was wounded by Heracles with an arrow covered with Hydra's blood, Chiron offered himself up to Zeus as a sacrifice to free him from his torture, making him a heroic figure.



Chiron's calm, intelligent nature could have been attributed to his parentage – he was the son of the Titan Cronus and not related to other centaurs

# CERBERUS

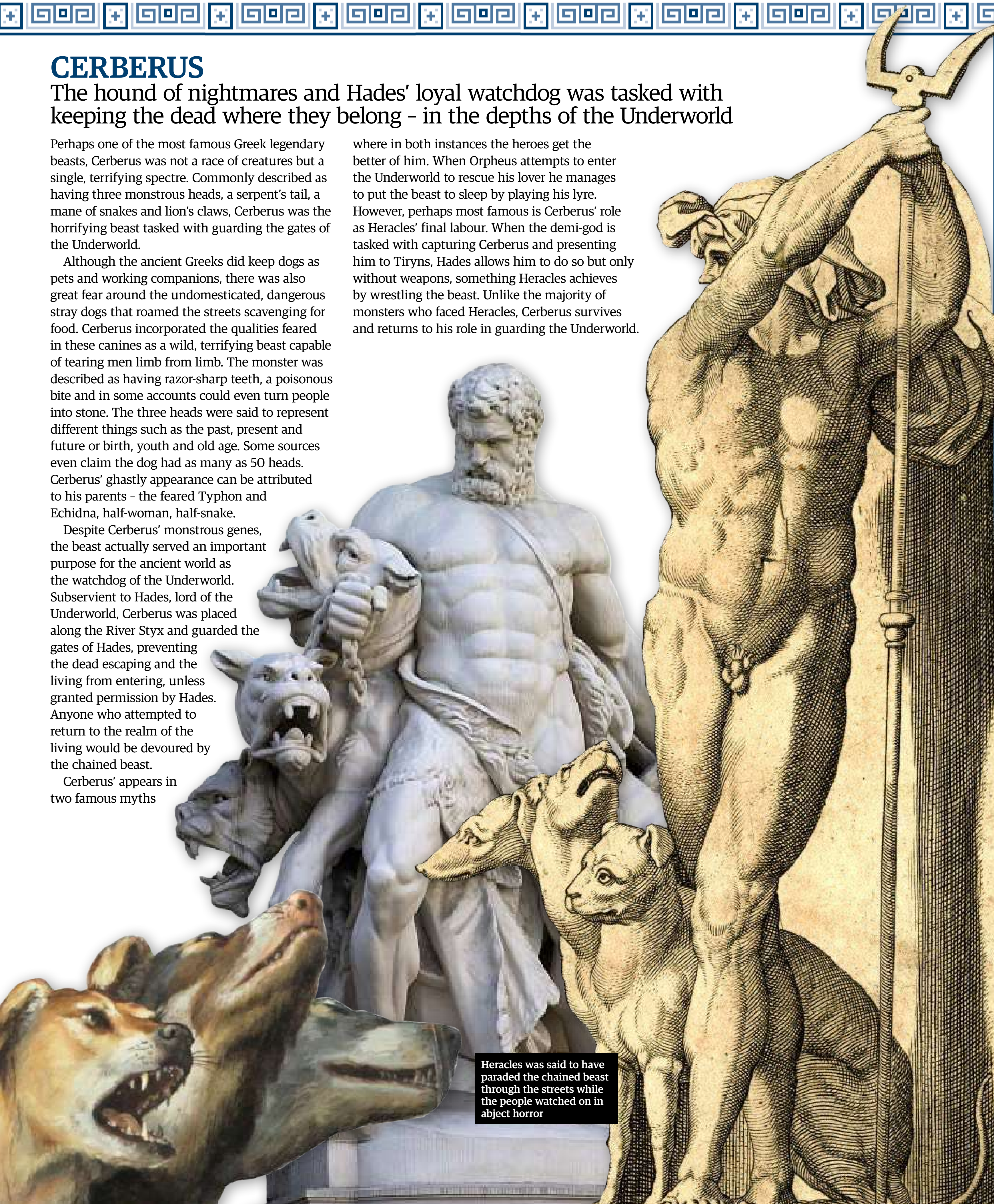
## The hound of nightmares and Hades' loyal watchdog was tasked with keeping the dead where they belong – in the depths of the Underworld

Perhaps one of the most famous Greek legendary beasts, Cerberus was not a race of creatures but a single, terrifying spectre. Commonly described as having three monstrous heads, a serpent's tail, a mane of snakes and lion's claws, Cerberus was the horrifying beast tasked with guarding the gates of the Underworld.

Although the ancient Greeks did keep dogs as pets and working companions, there was also great fear around the undomesticated, dangerous stray dogs that roamed the streets scavenging for food. Cerberus incorporated the qualities feared in these canines as a wild, terrifying beast capable of tearing men limb from limb. The monster was described as having razor-sharp teeth, a poisonous bite and in some accounts could even turn people into stone. The three heads were said to represent different things such as the past, present and future or birth, youth and old age. Some sources even claim the dog had as many as 50 heads. Cerberus' ghastly appearance can be attributed to his parents – the feared Typhon and Echidna, half-woman, half-snake.

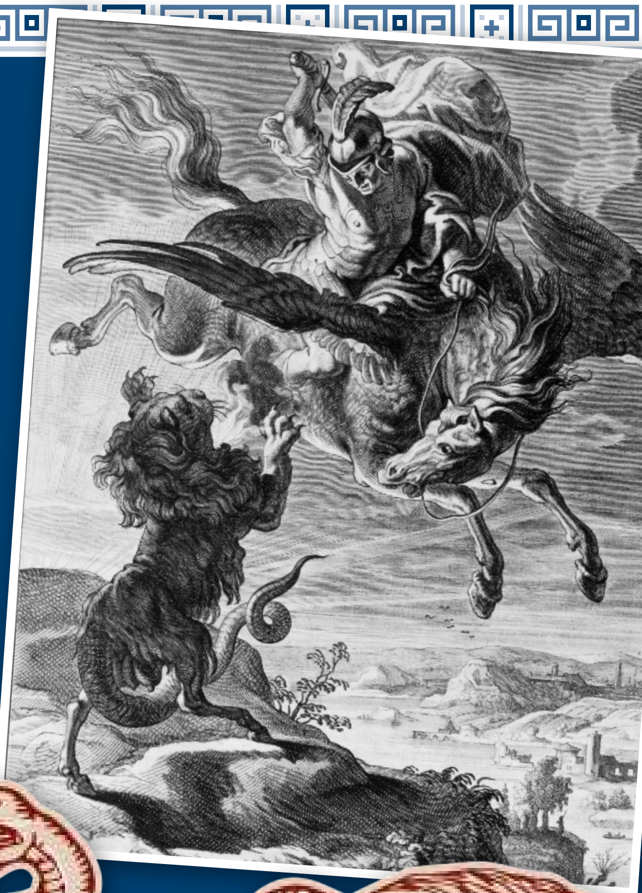
Despite Cerberus' monstrous genes, the beast actually served an important purpose for the ancient world as the watchdog of the Underworld. Subservient to Hades, lord of the Underworld, Cerberus was placed along the River Styx and guarded the gates of Hades, preventing the dead escaping and the living from entering, unless granted permission by Hades. Anyone who attempted to return to the realm of the living would be devoured by the chained beast.

Cerberus' appears in two famous myths where in both instances the heroes get the better of him. When Orpheus attempts to enter the Underworld to rescue his lover he manages to put the beast to sleep by playing his lyre. However, perhaps most famous is Cerberus' role as Heracles' final labour. When the demi-god is tasked with capturing Cerberus and presenting him to Tiryns, Hades allows him to do so but only without weapons, something Heracles achieves by wrestling the beast. Unlike the majority of monsters who faced Heracles, Cerberus survives and returns to his role in guarding the Underworld.



Heracles was said to have paraded the chained beast through the streets while the people watched on in abject horror

Although the Chimera had a mane, the close cut of the mane with the ears visible was a common depiction of female lions for the period



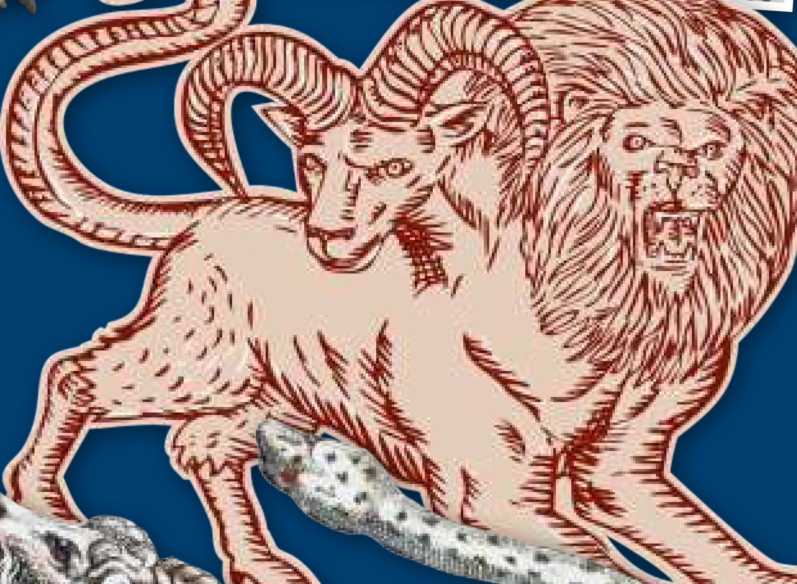
# CHIMERA

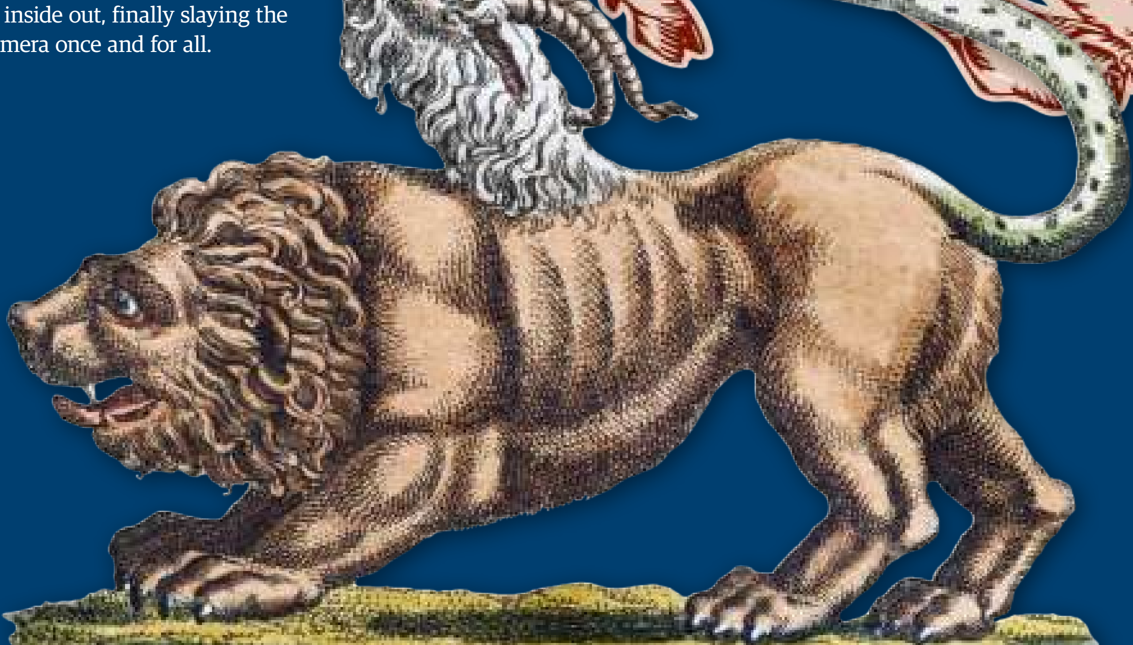
## A monstrous, fire-breathing hybrid, the Chimera was the stuff of nightmares, a beast that defied nature, reason and logic

Although today the term Chimera can be used to refer to any mythical animal comprising of several different animal parts, there was a singular beast originally referred to as the Chimera. This original monster was believed to be the offspring of the terrifying Typhon and Echidna, making it the sibling of the three-headed dog Cerberus.

The Chimera was described as having three heads: a lion, a goat and a dragon, however, the most common depiction of the beast in art is it having the head and body of a female lion, a goat's head sprouting from its back along with goat's udders and a serpent for a tail. It is one of the most peculiar of all Greek legendary beasts and largely regarded as one of the most terrifying due to its monstrous appearance. The Chimera was also known for having a horrific temper, ransacking villages, reigning hellfire upon innocents and slaughtering masses of people. Not only did it have a venomous bite, but it also had the ability to breathe fire, making it an incredibly dangerous foe. The Chimera developed a reputation for being a bad omen of natural disasters, and it was rumoured it could be seen lurking before a volcanic eruption.

In myth the Chimera was known to roam the Lynean countryside virtually unchallenged until the hero Bellerophon arrived. The son of Poseidon was challenged to kill the beast to clear his name of a crime he did not commit. With the help of the winged horse Pegasus, Bellerophon was able to attack the Chimera from the air, raining arrows down upon it. Finally, the hero threw a spear through the beast's fiery throat, which melted the lead and burned the monster from the inside out, finally slaying the Chimera once and for all.





# HYDRA

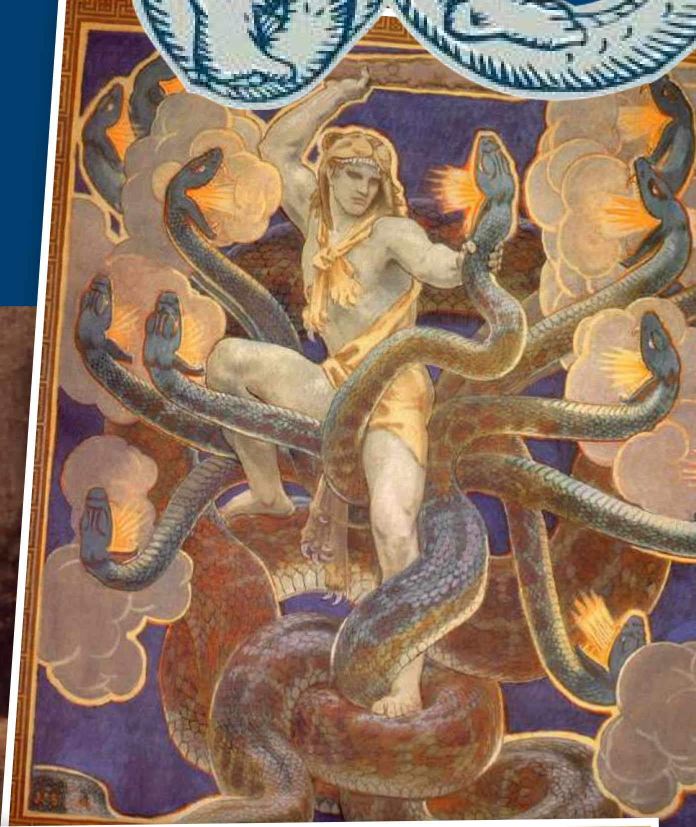
## Poisonous, deadly and virtually indestructible, this many-headed serpent was so dangerous even Heracles could not defeat it alone

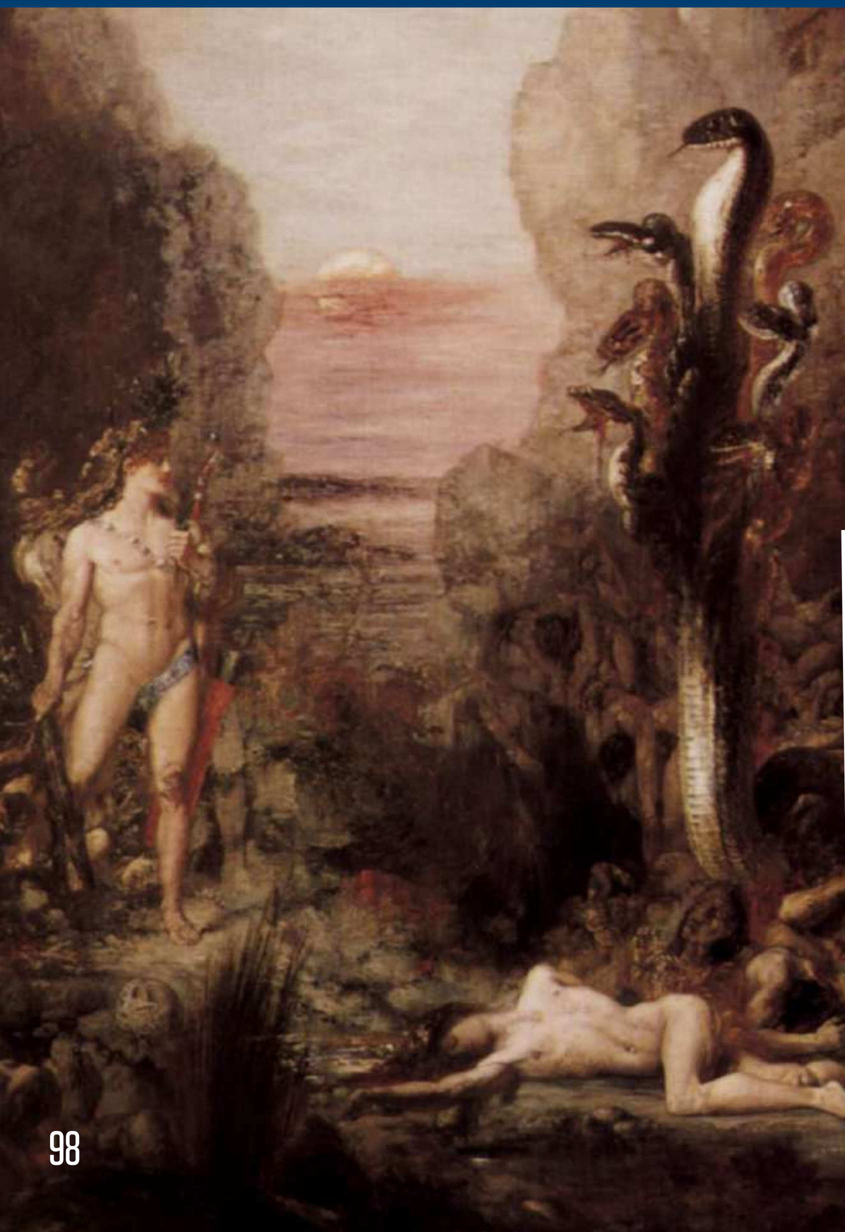
Like many of the most terrifying mythical beasts of Greek legend, the Hydra was the offspring of Typhon and Echidna, regarded as the father and mother of all monsters. The Hydra's lair was the lake of Lerna in the Argolid which was regarded by some to be an entrance to the Underworld. This makes sense when one observes the monster's hideous appearance.

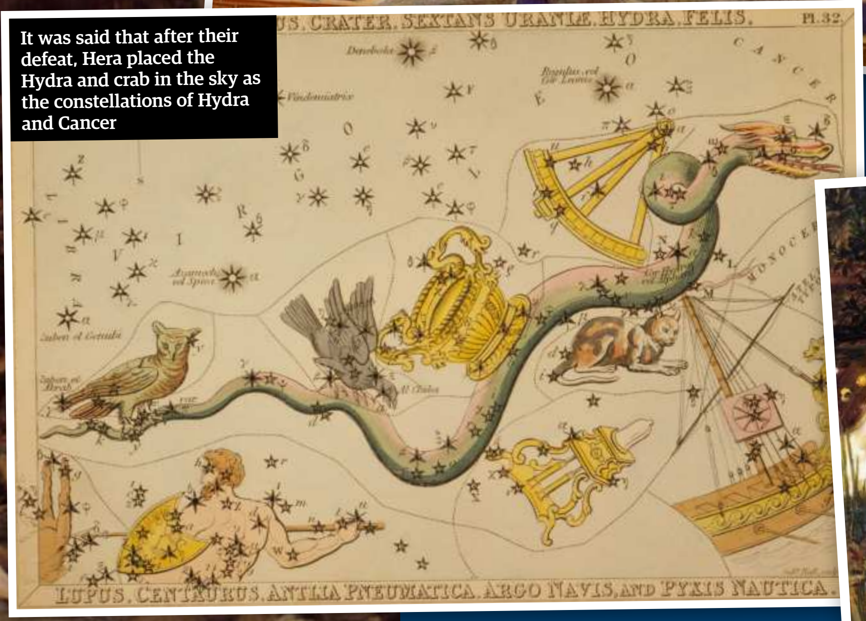
The Hydra was a giant serpent that possessed a great number of heads. Accounts vary from six heads to nine and even 50. Later versions of the Hydra myth added a terrifying ability to the beast – when one head was cut off it would regenerate two to replace it, making it a virtually unbeatable foe. The Hydra also had poisonous breath, and it was said that its scent alone was capable of killing a man.

This repertoire of deadly attributes made the Hydra the perfect beast to challenge Heracles as one of his 12 labours. It was said that Hera raised the beast specifically to put an end to the hero. Using a cloth to protect himself from the poisonous fumes, Heracles faced the Hydra alone. However, discovering its regeneration ability he called upon his nephew, Iolaus, for help. While Heracles cut off the heads, Iolaus cauterised the open stumps with a firebrand to prevent them growing back. As they began to gain the advantage, Hera sent a giant crab to help the Hydra, but Heracles simply crushed it under his foot. Eventually the hero managed to cut off the beast's final head with a golden sword given to him by Athena.

The beast defeated, Heracles dipped his arrows in its poisonous blood. This poison would play a part in Heracles' future adventures and ultimately lead to his own demise, the Hydra's final posthumous revenge against the demi-god that had slain him.







It was said that after their defeat, Hera placed the Hydra and crab in the sky as the constellations of Hydra and Cancer

S, CRATER, SEXTANS URANIÆ, HYDRA, FELIS,
Pl. 32
CANCER
MONOCEROS
LUPUS, CENTAURUS, ANTLIA PNEUMATICA, ARGO NAVIS, AND PYXIS NAUTICA.

## NYMPHS

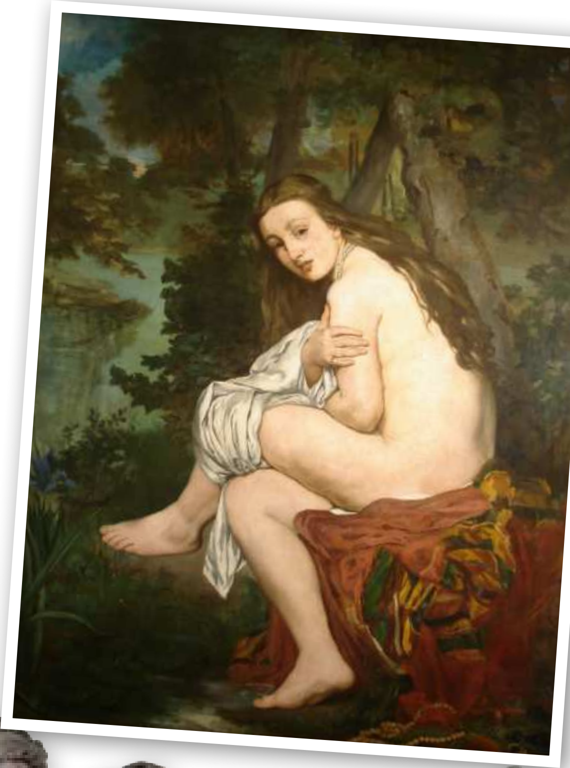
### Alluring, playful but also powerful and dangerous, nymphs held dominion over nature and the hearts of men

Young, female and beautiful, nymphs are popular among the Greek myths and grew in popularity in the ancient world too. These divine spirits were regarded as goddesses of nature that populated the Earth. Though ranked below the gods of Olympus, they were summoned to attend assemblies of the gods, so their importance cannot be understated.

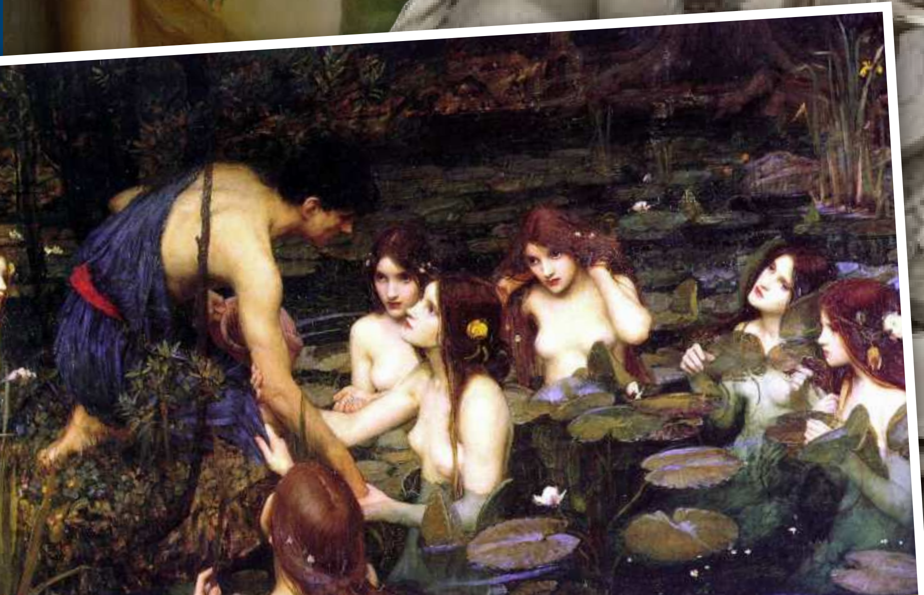
Nymphs generally would preside over any natural phenomena on Earth and were classified depending on what they were associated with. The nymphs of the mountains were known as the oreads; trees and flowers were the dryads and meliae; naiads presided over the springs, rivers and lakes; and nymphs of the sea were nereids. A lot of nymphs were also associated with gods and goddess, particularly those associated with nature, such as Apollo, Dionysus or Artemis.

In mythology the nymphs were portrayed as beautiful, playful and seductive. This was in stark contrast to the reserved wives and daughters commonly seen in Greek culture. It is probably because of this that so many nymphs were the mothers of gods and the subject of affairs with mortal men. It was even believed nymphs could drive mortals insane, known as nympholepsy.

Although the nymphs are often depicted positively, this isn't always the case. Melinoe was a nymph who was believed to bring nightmares and madness to men. The daughter of Persephone and either Zeus or Hades, Melinoe was born in the Underworld. Feared by mortals, the beautiful but vengeful spirit led the restless spirits of the dead to haunt the living at night. It was said that she was able to take on many different forms, with some believing her to be half black and half white, representing her links to both heaven and hell.



If a nymph had a child with a god she could give birth to fully immortal offspring, though they themselves were not immortal



# TYPHON

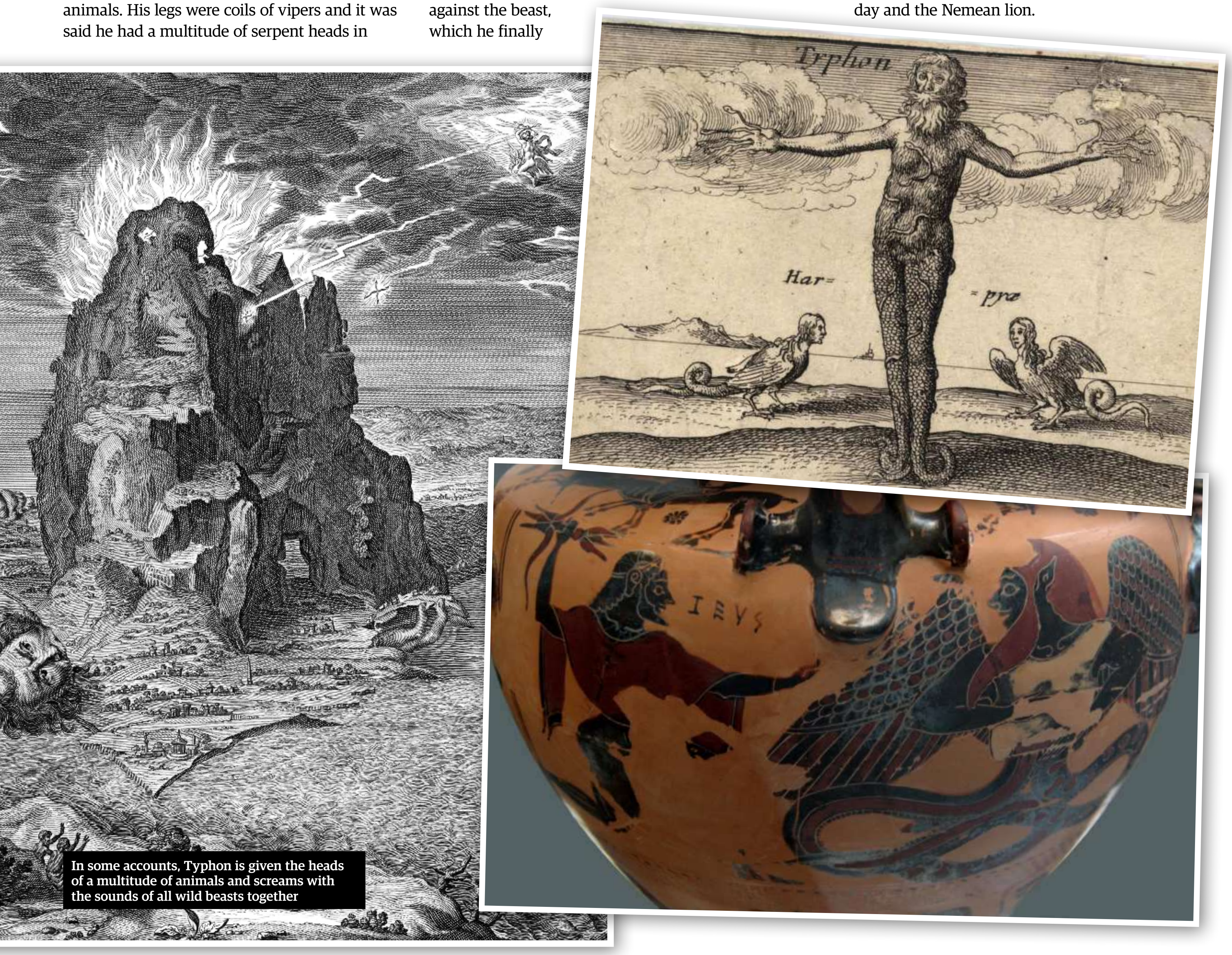
## The beast of all beasts, Typhon was so terrifying and powerful that only Zeus alone was brave enough to face it

Of all the monsters and creatures in Greek mythology, Typhon was regarded as the deadliest and most dangerous of them all. Typhon was more than a monster – he was a god, and his name alone struck fear into Greeks.

The son of Gaia and Tartarus, some myths attribute the creation of Typhon to Hera, who wished to create a being that could challenge Zeus. The beast was described as being so huge that his head skimmed the stars themselves, and he was said to have the torso of a man but with hundreds of wings from different animals. His legs were coils of vipers and it was said he had a multitude of serpent heads in place of fingers. His eyes glowed red, his hands were made of coils of snakes and he could even breathe fire. Typhon is also described as being soot black in colour with filthy hair. The descriptions of this beast differ depending on the sources, but they all conjure images of a truly terrifying being.

Typhon was believed to be a storm giant, and he used his powers to go to war with Zeus. Typhon scared the gods so much that they retreated into their animal forms to escape him. This left Zeus to fight a cataclysmic battle against the beast, which he finally won with the aid of his thunderbolts. Upon defeating him, Zeus threw the monster into the bottomless pit of Tartarus. In some stories Mount Etna was placed over the beast to prevent his escape. Because of this, volcanic eruptions were believed to be caused by Typhon trying to escape the volcano, and earthquakes were also triggered by the beast.

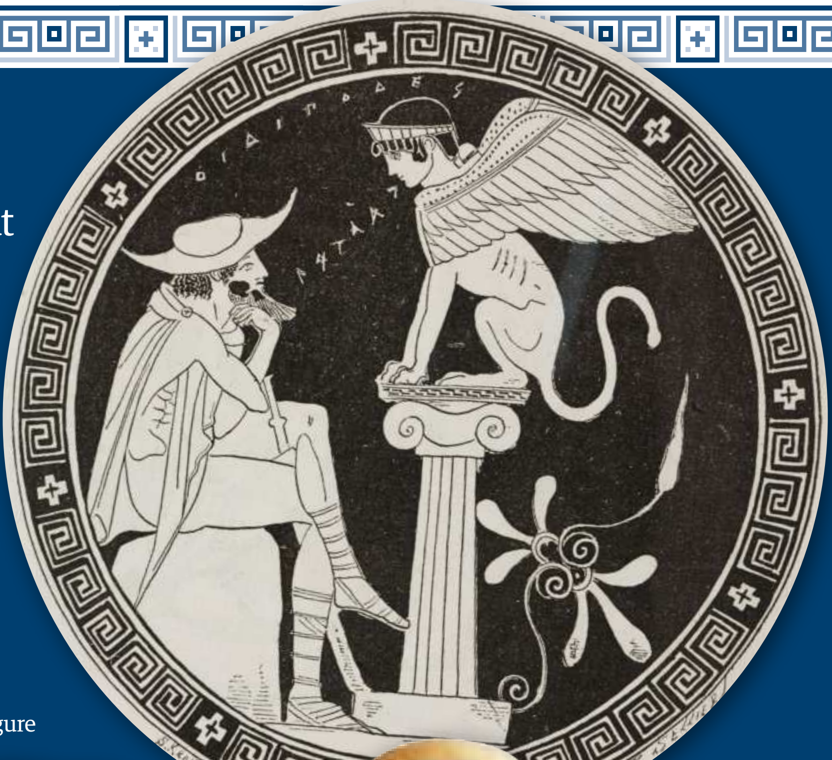
Typhon and his wife Echidna were said to have given birth to many infamous monsters, such as the Sphinx, Cerberus, Hydra, the Caucasian eagle who ate Prometheus' liver every day and the Nemean lion.



In some accounts, Typhon is given the heads of a multitude of animals and screams with the sounds of all wild beasts together

# SPHINX

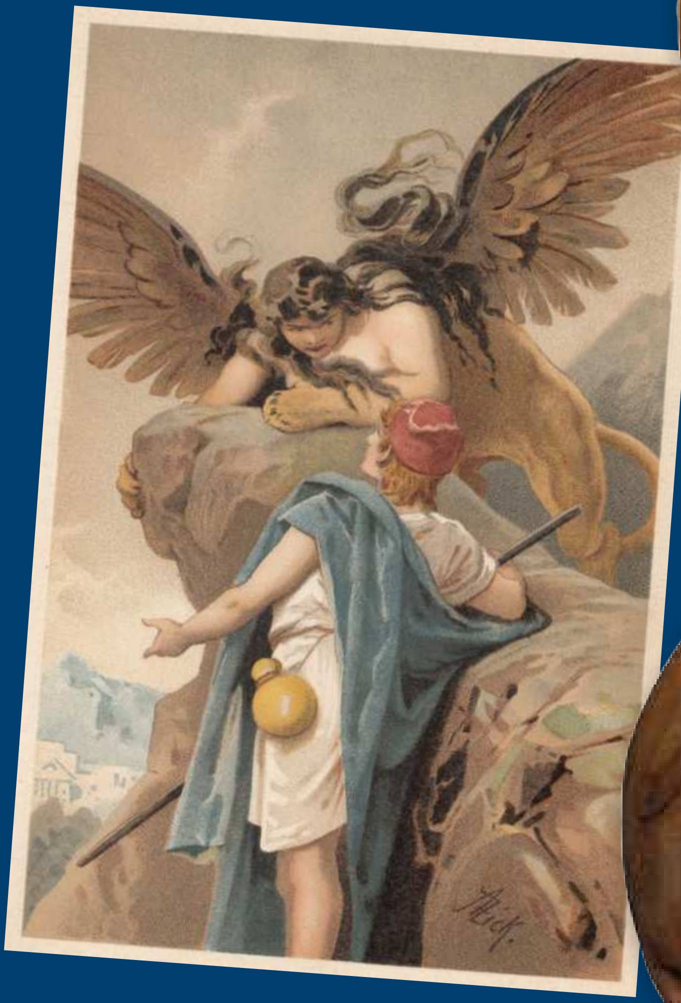
## Asker of the most famous riddle in history, the Sphinx was not simply a famous monument but also a terrifying beast of Greek myth



Although the Sphinx is commonly associated with Egyptian mythology, it also appeared in that of the Greeks, which does show how closely linked the two cultures were. In Greek myth, the Sphinx is represented as having the head of a human, the body of a lion, the wings of an eagle and sometimes a tail with the head of a serpent. The Sphinx wasn't a race, but rather one mythical being. Believed to be female, she was the daughter of the monster Orthrus and either Echidna or the Chimera.

The Sphinx was regarded as a terrible demon of ill fortune and destruction. She would sit outside the entrance of Thebes, and for travellers to pass through they would have to answer a riddle posed to them by the beast. "Which is the creature that has one voice, but has four feet in the morning, two feet in the afternoon, and three feet at night?" they were asked. Anyone unable to answer correctly was then devoured by the Sphinx. Oedipus managed to solve the riddle by answering, "Man - who crawls on all fours as a baby, then walks on two feet as an adult, and then uses a walking stick in old age." In some accounts there was also a second riddle for Oedipus.

Finally beaten at her game, the Sphinx cast herself from her high rock, or, by some accounts, devoured herself. It is due to this story that Oedipus is seen as a figure that represents the transition from Greece's old, traditional religious practices to the new ones of the Olympian gods.



It was said that it was Hera who placed the Sphinx outside Thebes from her Ethiopian homeland, indicating that the Greeks were very aware that the Sphinx was a 'foreign' beast

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# SECRETS OF THE ORACLE

## The oracles of Delphi have been shrouded in mystery for millennia, but now scientists believe they have an explanation

Ancient Greece was a world dominated by men. Men filled the highest positions in society, men fought on the battlefield and men ruled the mightiest empires. However, all these men, from the lowliest peasant to the emperor himself, sought the council and advice of one person - and that person was a woman.

The city of Delphi had long traditions of being the centre of the world; it was said that Zeus himself named it the navel of Gaia. According to legend, a huge serpent, named Python, guarded the spot before it was slain by the infant god Apollo. When Apollo's arrows pierced the serpent, its body fell into a fissure and great fumes arose from the crevice as its carcass rotted. All those who stood over the gaping fissure fell into sudden, often violent, trances. In this state, it was believed that Apollo would possess the person and fill them with divine presence.

> The most important oracles of Greek antiquity were Pythia in Delphi and of Dione at Dodona in Epirus

These peculiar occurrences attracted Apollo-worshipping settlers during the Mycenaean era, and slowly but surely the primitive sanctuary grew into a shrine, and then, by 7th century BCE, a temple. It would come to house a single person, chosen to serve as the bridge between this world and the next. Named after the great serpent, this chosen seer was named the Pythia - the oracle.

Communication with a god was no small matter, and not just anyone could be allowed or trusted to serve this venerated position. It was decided that a pure, chaste and honest young virgin would be the most appropriate vessel for such a divine role. However, there was one drawback - beautiful young virgins were prone to attracting negative attention from the men who sought their council, which resulted in oracles being raped and violated. Older women of at least 50 began to fill the position, and as a reminder of what used to be, they would dress in the virginal garments of old.

These older women were often chosen from the priestesses of Delphi temple, but could also be any respected native of Delphi. Educated noblewomen were prized, but even peasants could fill the position. Those Pythia who were previously married were required to relinquish all family responsibility and even their individual identities. To be an oracle was to take up an ancient and vitally important role - one that transcended the self, and entered into legend. Pythia were so important so it was essential that they were a blank slate - children, husbands and any links to previous life had to be severed in favour of Apollo and divinity.

The reason for the growing importance of the oracles was simple - the Pythia provided answers. For an ambitious and religious civilisation, this very visual and vocal link to the gods was treated with the utmost respect. For the nine warmest months of each year, on the seventh day of each month the Pythia would accept questions from all members of Greek society. This was to correspond with the belief that Apollo deserted the temple during the winter months.

GREECE
TURKEY

# Ask the Oracle

## If you have a problem or simply wish to know what the future holds – the oracle has the answer

**I'm a Spartan lawmaker and recently outside influence has been threatening our proud nation. Are these other countries a bad influence or am I being an old stick in the mud?**

**Lycurgus, Sparta**

*Love of money and nothing else will ruin Sparta.*

I know it's silly but I'm absolutely obsessed with my own death! Do you have any idea what I can do to prevent my early demise?

**Lysander, Sparta**

*Beware the serpent, earthborn, in craftiness coming behind thee.*

**I've recently captured my own island. I have to come up with some laws but I'm not sure what sort of ruler I should be. Any advice?**

**Solon, Athens**

*Seat yourself now amid ships, for you are the pilot of Athens. Grasp the helm fast in your hands; you have many allies in your city.*

**An old foe has reared his ugly head and wants to face my soldiers in battle. The only problem is that we are vastly outnumbered. Should I face him?**

**Leonidas, Sparta**

*The strength of bulls or lions cannot stop the foe. No, he will not leave off, until he tears the city or the king limb from limb.*

**Although I'm already a king, I feel unfulfilled with my life. I want to do something really impressive. What should I do to make my name?**

**Philip, Macedon**

*With silver spears you may conquer the world.*

**My friend is a really important person, but he's been making some really questionable decisions lately. Should I stick by him?**

**Cicero, Arpino**

*Make your own nature, not the advice of others, your guide in this life.*

**My enemy will not leave me alone! I know I can't fight him, but is there a way I can at least defend myself from his attacks?**

**Themistocles, Athens**

*A wall of wood alone shall be uncaptured, a boon to you and your children.*

My friend, Socrates, is such a know-it-all. He literally has an answer for everything. Please settle a dispute for us: is there anyone who is smarter than him?

**Chaerephon, Athens**

*No human is wiser.*

**My dad was a very famous soldier and everyone expects me to follow in his footsteps. Now war has broken out, I feel pressured to join the army. But I am not sure. Should I sign up?**

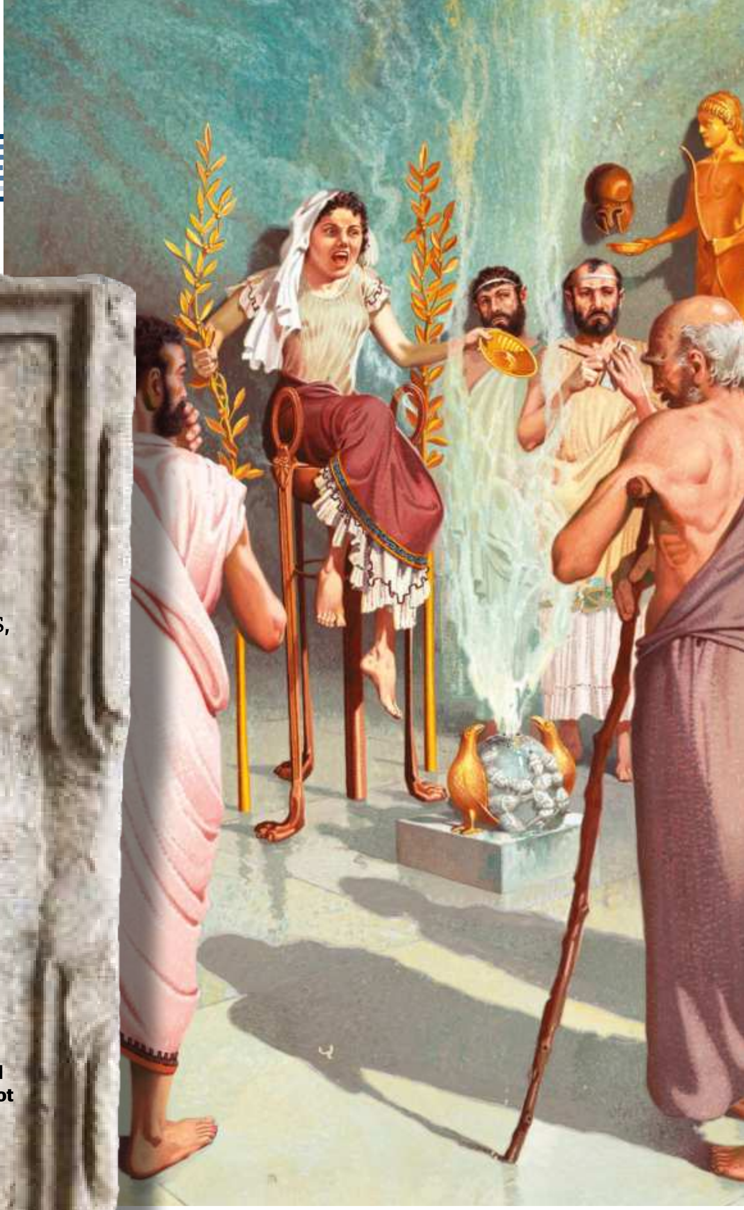
**Gaios, Delphi**

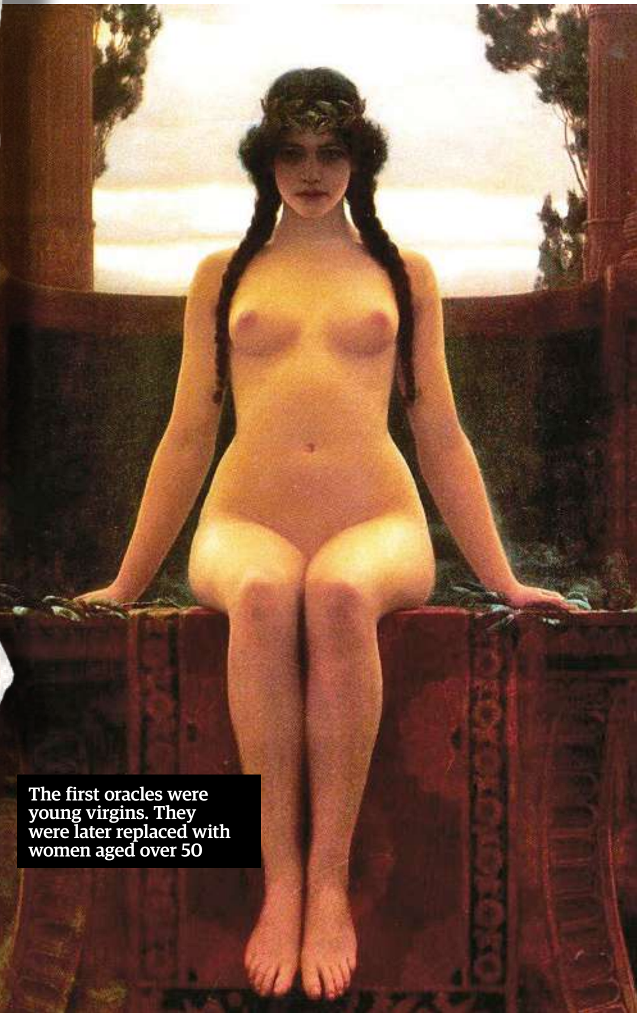
*You will go, return not die in the war.*

**I've sacrificed everything, even family members, for power. But it's still not enough. What can I do to satisfy my greed?**

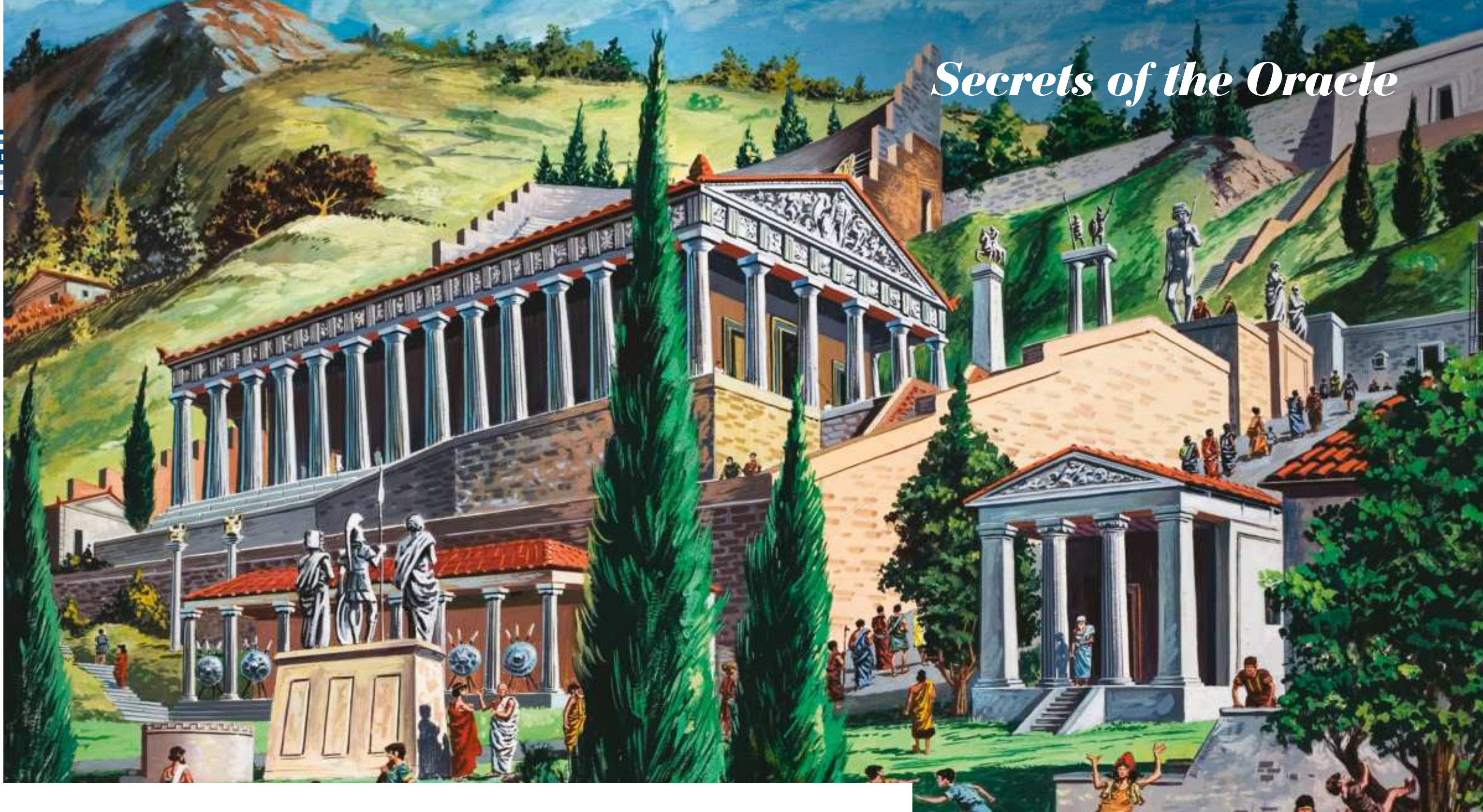
**Nero, Antium**

*Your presence here outrages the god that you seek. Go back, matricide! The number 73 marks the hour of your downfall!*

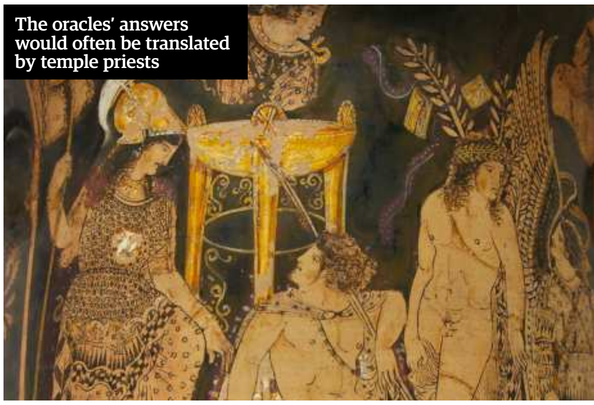




The first oracles were young virgins. They were later replaced with women aged over 50



The site of Delphi was one of the most sacred in Ancient Greece



The oracles' answers would often be translated by temple priests

After being 'purified' by fasting, drinking holy water and bathing in the sacred Castalian Spring, the Pythia would assume her position upon a tripod seat, clasping laurel reeds in one hand and a dish of spring water in the other. Positioned above the gaping fissure, the vapours of the ancient vanquished serpent would wash over her and she would enter the realm of the divine.

People flocked from far and wide to speak to the woman who could communicate with the gods. Known as consultants, many of those who wished to ask the oracle a question would travel for days or even weeks to reach Delphi. Once they arrived they underwent an intense grilling from the priests, who would determine the genuine cases and instruct them the correct way to frame their questions. Those who were approved then had to undergo a variety of traditions, such as carrying laurel wreaths to the temple. It was also encouraged for consultants to provide a monetary donation as well as an animal to be sacrificed. Once the animal had been sacrificed, its guts would be studied. If the signs were seen as unfavourable, the consultant could be sent home. Finally, the consultant was allowed to approach the Pythia and ask his question. In some accounts, it seems the oracles gave the answers, but others report the Pythia would utter incomprehensible words that the priests would 'translate' into verse. Once he received his answer, the consultant would journey home to act upon the advice of the oracle.

This was the tricky part. The oracle received a multitude of visitors in the nine days she was available, from farmers desperate to know the outcome of the harvest to emperors asking if they should wage war on their enemies, and her answers were not always clear. Responses, or their translations by the temple priests, often seemed deliberately phrased so that, no matter the outcome, the oracle would always be right. It was essential for the consultant to carefully consider her words, or else risk a bad harvest, or even the defeat of an entire army. When Croesus, the king of Lydia, asked the oracle if he should attack Persia, he received the response: "If you cross the river, a great empire will be destroyed." He viewed this as a good omen and went ahead with the invasion. Unfortunately, the great empire that was destroyed was his own. In this way, the oracle, just like the gods, was infallible, and her divine reputation grew. To question the oracle was to question the gods - and that was unthinkable.

Soon, no major decision was made before consulting the oracle of Delphi. It wasn't just Greek people, but also foreign dignitaries, leaders and kings who travelled to Delphi for a chance to ask the oracle a question. Those who could afford it would pay great sums of money for a fast pass through the long lines of pilgrims and commoners. Using these donations, the temple grew in size and prominence. Quickly, Delphi seemed to be fulfilling its own prophecy of being the centre of the world, and attracted visitors for the Pythian Games, a precursor of the Olympic Games. On the influence of the oracle's statements, Delphi became a powerful and prosperous city-state. The oracle sat at the centre of not just the city of Delphi, but the great Greek empire itself. No important decision was made without her consultation, and so, for nearly a thousand years, the position of perhaps the greatest political and social influence in the ancient world was occupied by a woman.

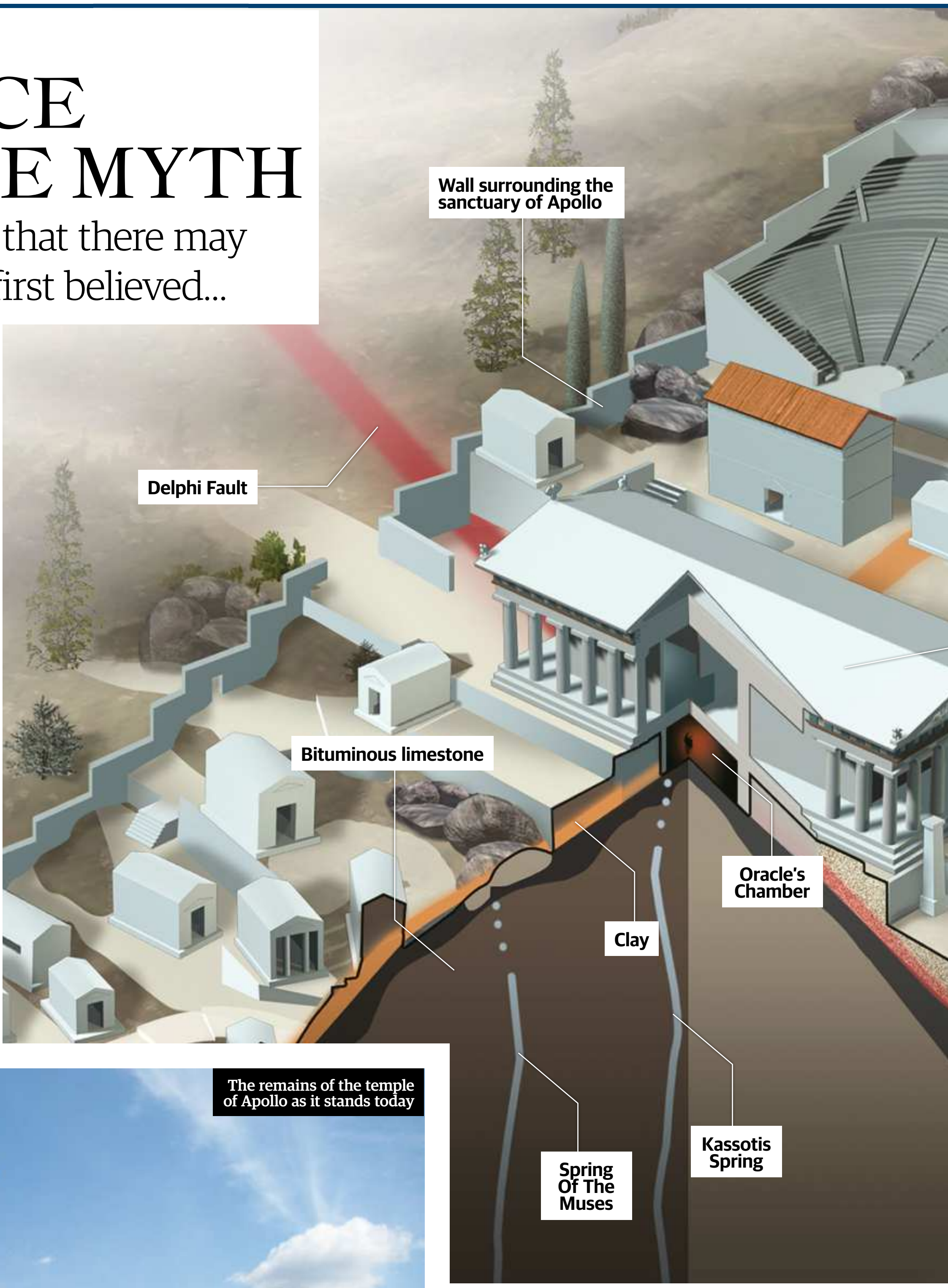
# THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE MYTH

## Excavations have revealed that there may be more to the story than first believed...

Ever since the emergence of science in society, a scientific explanation for the Pythia's visionary trances has been sought. One of the most valuable accounts of the oracle's trances comes from Plutarch, who served as a priest at the temple in Delphi. He described how sweet-smelling gases arising from the fissure would cause the priestesses to fall into a strange trance. It seemed there was some truth to Plutarch's account, as when archaeologists studied the temple ruins they discovered a few peculiar features.

The inner sanctum where the Pythia sat, for example, was two to four metres below the level of the surrounding floor, and there was also a nearby drain for spring water. This structure was unique when compared to any other Ancient Greek temple. All of this proved one thing - that there was definitely something strange going on in the temple of Apollo.

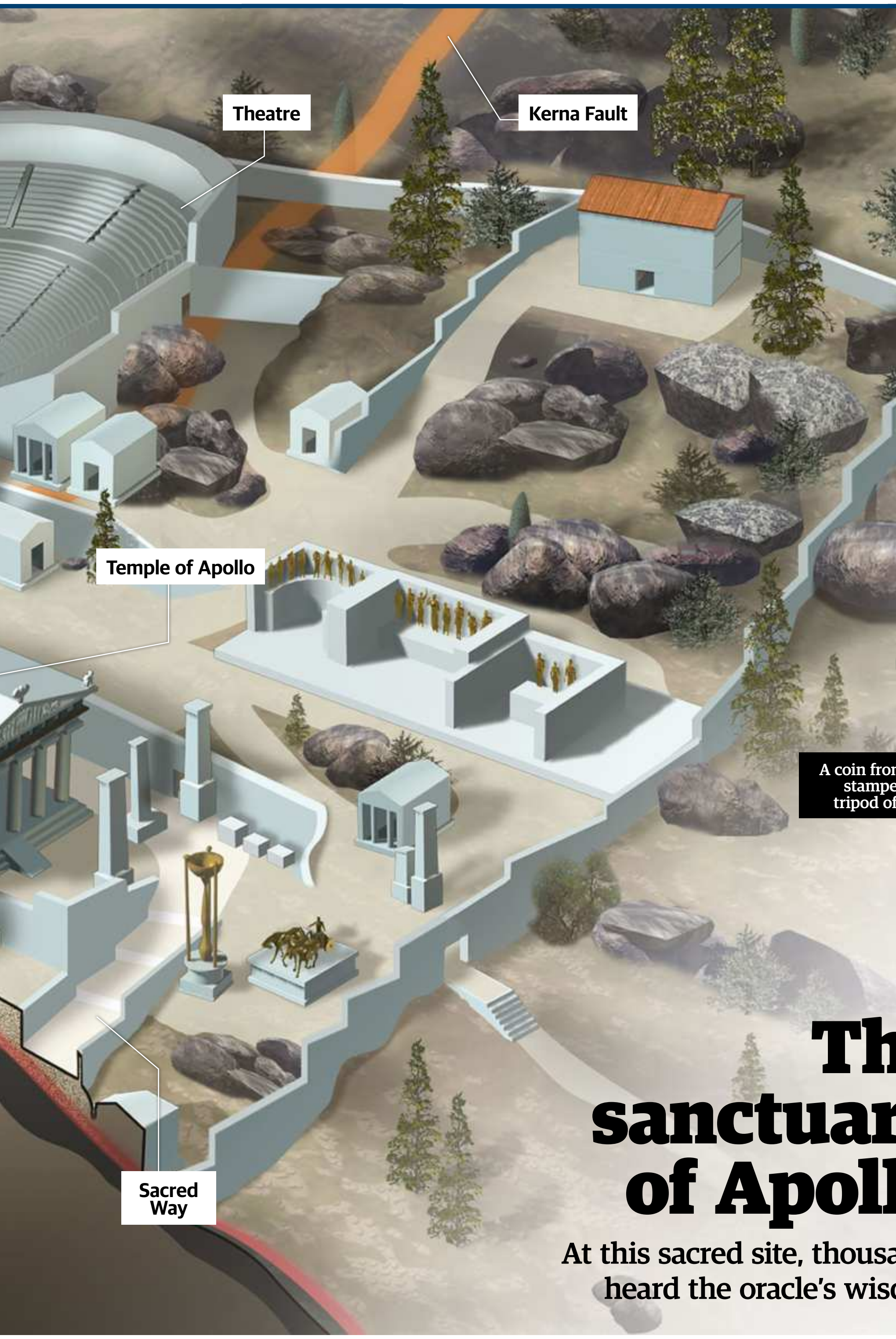
Curious about the existence of the fissure mentioned in Plutarch's accounts, in 1892, French archaeologists set about excavating the ruins of the temple with the goal of discovering an ancient cave or hole in the ground. However, surprisingly, nothing of the sort was found. By 1904, it was declared that Plutarch's temple fumes were simply an ancient myth, and never really existed. In 1948, the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* read that: "Excavation has rendered improbable the



The remains of the temple of Apollo as it stands today

## Alternative theories

The oracles claimed their trances came from Apollo, scientists blame gases, but these aren't the only explanations for the peculiar incidents



# The sanctuary of Apollo

At this sacred site, thousands heard the oracle's wisdom

### Snake venom

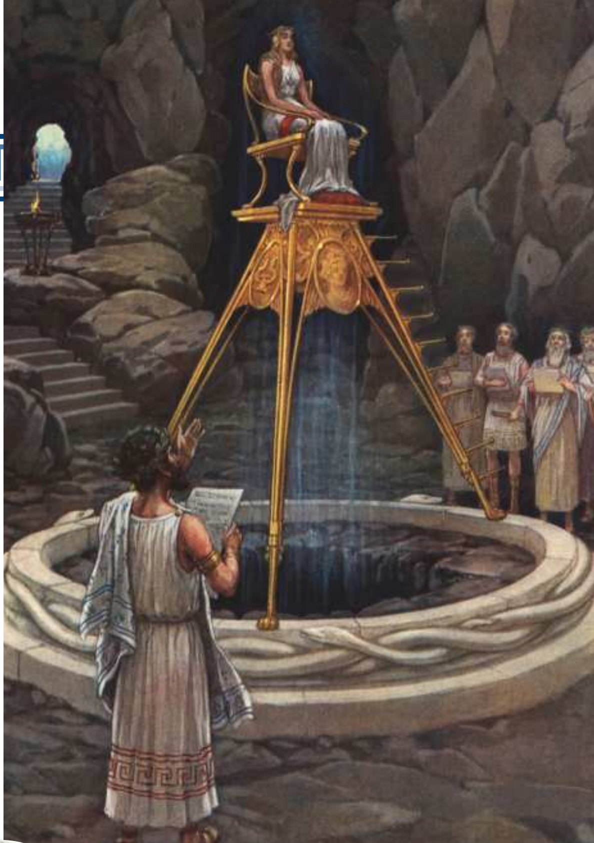
It is possible that the trances were brought on by snake venom, particularly that of the cobra or krait snake. After becoming immunised against the venom, a bite from a snake can produce hallucinogenic symptoms that affect the person's emotional and mental state.

### Laurel leaves

Laurel leaves were always carried by the oracles, and they were also reported to chew on them because of their link with Apollo. It has been hypothesised that it was the leaves that brought on the oracle's trances, but as they are not hallucinogenic, this is unlikely.

### Political puppets

One of the most popular theories explaining the state of the oracles is that they were simply faking their trances. Because of the power that their prophecies could hold, it's theorised that the priests or the women themselves manipulated this power as they saw fit.



Worship of the oracle came to an end in 390 CE

A coin from 480 BCE stamped with the tripod of the oracle

post-classical theory of a chasm with mephitic vapours."

That was believed to be true until the late 1980s, when a new team of curious scientists decided to investigate the ruins for themselves. The rocks they discovered beneath the temple were oily bituminous limestone and were fractured by two faults that crossed beneath the temple. This had to be more than a coincidence. The scientists theorised that tectonic movements and ancient earthquakes caused friction along the faults. Combined with the spring water that ran beneath the temple, methane, ethylene and ethane gas would rise through the faults to the centre and directly into the temple. The low room with its limited ventilation and lack of oxygen would help amplify the effect of the gases and induce the trance-like symptoms experienced by the oracles.

It was the ethylene gas especially that drew a lot of interest. Ethylene is a sweet-smelling gas, just like Plutarch had reported, and in small doses is said to have the ability to cause trances and frenzied states. Tests conducted with ethylene reported that a dosage higher than 20 per cent could cause unconsciousness; however, less than that and the patient was able to sit up and answer questions, though their voice was altered. There were also instances of fits, thrashing, loss of memory and altered speech patterns, all of which correspond with Plutarch's accounts of the oracles. However, as is always the case with speculative science, this theory is not universally agreed upon, and other scientists argue that other gases such as carbon dioxide and methane are responsible for the hallucinogenic states. Either way, it seems the answer to the question of the mysterious Delphi oracles lies in the peculiar structure of the temple and unique geography of the site, which all aligned to produce something truly remarkable.

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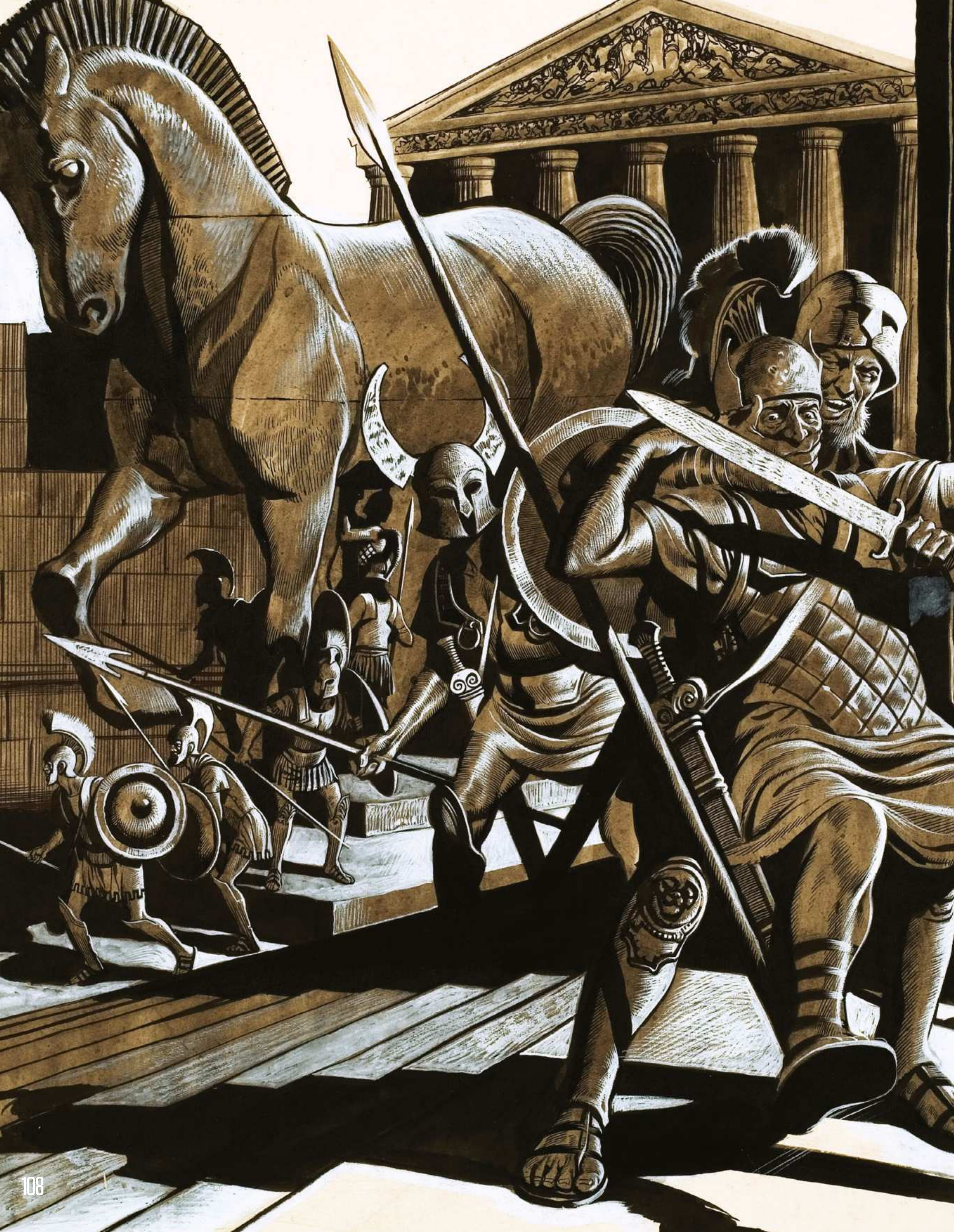


# THE TRUTH BEHIND THE TROJAN WAR

Thanks to new excavations and progress in the study of ancient texts, scholars are more convinced than ever that there is a kernel of truth in the myth

The Greeks and Romans often retold the story of the Trojan War, but the earliest and most prestigious version is Homer's. He was a Greek-speaking poet who probably lived in about 700 BCE in what is now western Turkey and composed two epic poems, stories of heroes long gone by. They are the *Iliad* or *Story of Ilion* (that is, Troy) and the *Odyssey* or *Story of Odysseus*. Their focus, the Trojan War, took place about 500 years earlier.

Homer enjoyed a long tradition of oral poetry and even perhaps written sources going back to the era of the Trojan War, and he could visit sites and monuments beginning with the ruins of Troy. His poems combine fact and myth.

According to myth, the Trojan War was a great conflict lasting ten years and pitting all Greece against the Trojans and their allies. Heroic champions fought on both sides. Even Amazons and Ethiopians got involved before the war was done. The Olympian gods themselves played a major role.

The cause of the war was a woman: Helen, the beautiful queen of Sparta, known in English as Helen of Troy. Prince Paris (also known as Alexander) of Troy seduced Helen while visiting Sparta. The two fled to Troy, taking with them much of Sparta's treasury. Supported by the other Greek kings, Helen's husband, King Menelaus, and his brother, King Agamemnon of Mycenae, put together an armed Greek coalition to sail to Troy with an ultimatum. The Greeks landed at Troy and demanded the return of the beauty Helen and the treasure. The Trojans refused this demand, and so the war came. For nine years the Greeks ravaged and looted the Trojan countryside and surrounding islands, but they made no progress against the city of Troy, an impregnable fortress.

Then, the Greek army nearly fell apart. A deadly epidemic was followed by a mutiny on the part of Greece's greatest warrior, Achilles. The issue, once again, was a woman: this time, the beautiful Briseis, a prize of war unjustly grabbed from Achilles by Agamemnon. Achilles withdrew himself and his men from fighting. The Trojans, led by their hero Hector, nearly destroyed the Greeks, but after they killed Achilles' friend and lieutenant Patroclus, Achilles returned to battle. He killed Hector and saved the Greek army.

But the war dragged on - most of the details come from other epic poems besides Homer's, now largely lost. Achilles himself is killed. Finally, the Greek hero Odysseus leads the Greeks to victory at Troy by thinking up the brilliant trick of smuggling Greek warriors into Troy in the Trojan Horse, an operation that he also led. Troy was sacked, and of the major Trojan heroes, only Aeneas survived. The Romans later claimed that Aeneas and a group of Trojan refugees crossed the Mediterranean to Italy and founded what eventually became Rome.

But how much of the *Iliad* stems from truth? Is it all just myth, passed down from generation to generation, or is there a more historical basis to the Trojan War? Thanks to new findings, we can finally begin to piece together the mystery.

# MYCENAEAN GREECE

A thousand years before the Parthenon, a remarkable civilisation thrived in Greece and engaged with rivals across the Aegean Sea

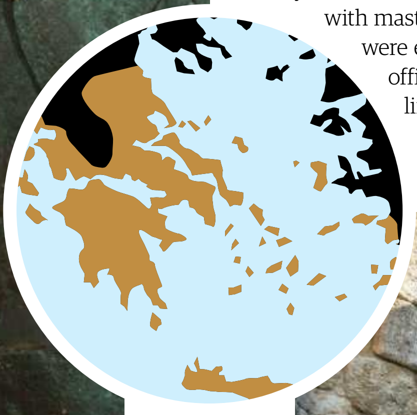
Between 1450 and 1180 BCE, Greece was dominated by a series of warrior kingdoms, of which the most important were Mycenae, Thebes, Tiryns and Pylos. We call their civilisation Mycenaean. The inhabitants spoke Greek, as shown by thousands of surviving texts written in a syllabic script called Linear B, a predecessor to the later Greek alphabet. They worshipped the same pagan gods that feature in the *Iliad*.

Mycenaean kings lived in palaces decorated with masterworks of art. Elite women were elegant and well dressed. Palace officials supervised the economic life of the kingdom and collected taxes and tribute. Their engineers built roads, bridges, fortifications, drainage works and large vaulted tombs. The city of Mycenae itself was eventually walled and entered via the Lion Gate that still impresses visitors today.

In the 15th century BCE, the Mycenaeans conquered Crete, the southwestern Aegean islands and the city of Miletus on Turkey's Aegean coast. Over the next several centuries, they engaged in war, diplomacy, commerce and dynastic intermarriage with the kingdoms of the eastern Mediterranean. They advanced eastward into Lycia (southwestern Turkey) and Cyprus, provoked revolts in western Anatolia and pushed into the islands of the northeastern Aegean.

There were various kingdoms in Western Turkey in the Late Bronze Age, but by far the

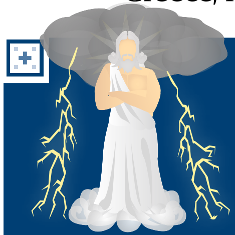
Mycenaean armour made of bronze plates


**Mycenaean Greece**
**(1400-1100 BCE)**

The Lion Gate was the main entrance of the Bronze-Age citadel of Mycenae, southern Greece

## The Greek gods

The Olympians, the gods thought to inhabit Mount Olympus in central Greece, figure prominently in the myths of the Trojan War


**Zeus**
**King of the gods**
Claimed to be neutral in the Trojan War, but really favoured the victory of the Trojans.

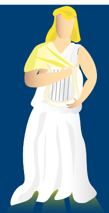
**Hera**
**Queen of the gods**
Zeus's wife, she constantly punished his lovers for his infidelity, while she remained pure.

**Poseidon**
**God of the sea**
Easily angered, he lost patronage of Athens to Athena, so sent a monster to attack it.

**Hades**
**God of the Underworld**
Lived in the Underworld. Although not evil, he didn't let the dead escape justice.

**Ares**
**God of war**
Worshipped for war, but was sometimes considered too bloodthirsty and extreme.

**Aphrodite**
**Goddess of love and beauty**
Patron of Troy and in particular of Prince Paris, and Aeneas – her son by the mortal Anchises.


**Apollo**
**God of music, art, truth, and prophecy**
The twin of Artemis, he was associated with the arts, knowledge, and the oracle of prophecy.

most important was what Hittite sources call Wilusa. The subject of international conflict and civil war, Wilusa is accepted by many scholars as the place the Greeks called first Wilion and then Ilion - Troy. The Hittite texts also refer to a great kingdom across the sea known as Ahhiyawa, which most scholars equate with the Achaeans, the Mycenaean Greeks. The 'Ahhiyawa Letter' records correspondence between a Mycenaean king and the Hittite king in about 1250 BCE.

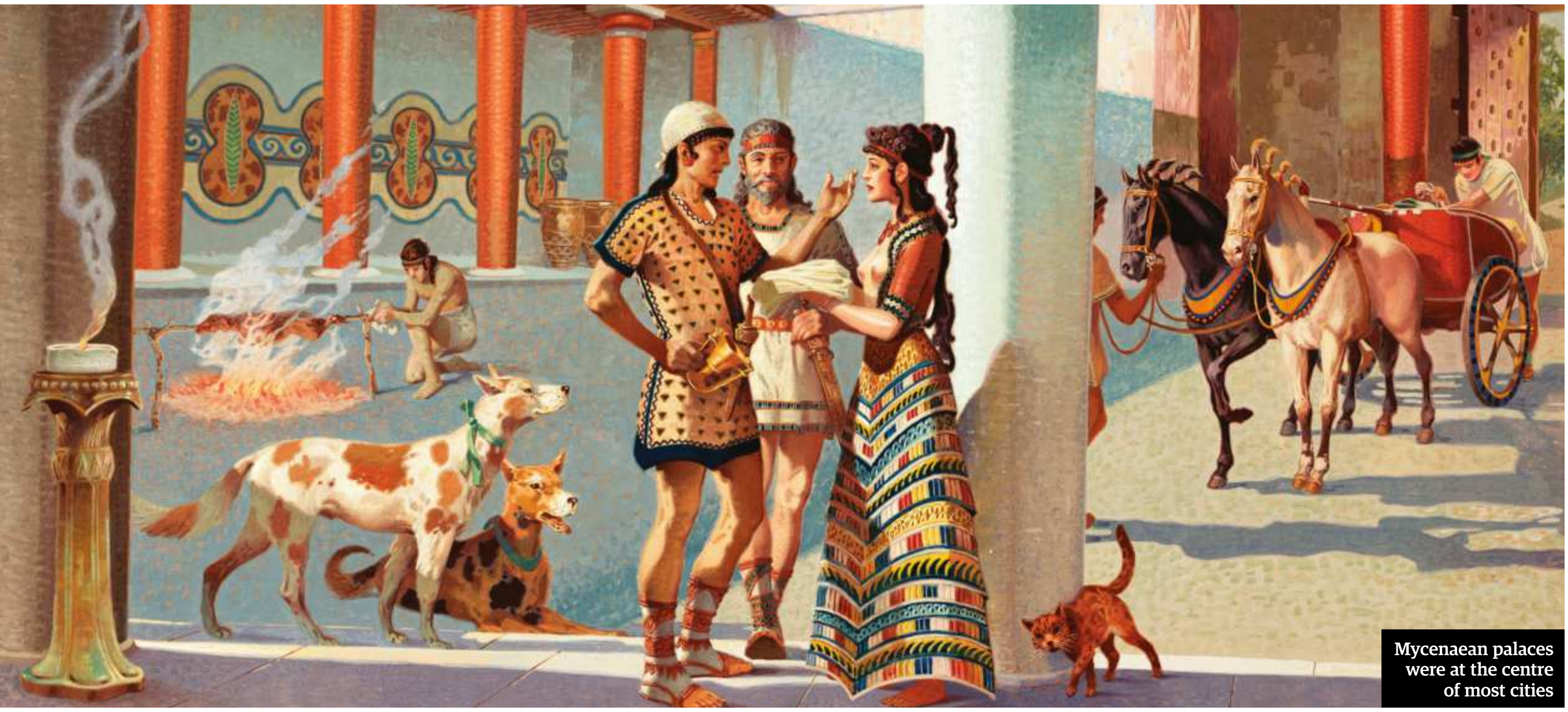
Troy was a great city for 2000 years, from about 3000 to 950 BCE. After being abandoned, Troy was resettled by Greek colonists in about 750 BCE and remained a small Greek city throughout antiquity, including the Roman period, and into the Byzantine era before it was abandoned. In the Late Bronze Age, Troy was wealthy and powerful. It was the largest city around the Aegean Sea, a major regional centre - if not nearly as large as the great cities of central Anatolia, the Levant, or Mesopotamia. Late-Bronze-Age Troy controlled important harbours and protected itself with a huge complex of walls, ditches and wooden palisades. If any period of Troy corresponds to the great city of the Trojan War, this was it.

Today we consider war the result of impersonal forces, be they economic, political or cultural. Late-Bronze-Age culture did the opposite and tended to think in personal terms. War resulted from vendettas, insults and marriage disputes. The Amarna Letters - a 1300s BCE cache of diplomatic correspondence between Egypt, Canaan and the Hittite kingdom - offer many examples, from wars over slights to a man's father to a punitive raid after a prince was killed en route to his marriage to a foreign princess. When Homer attributed the Trojan War to a quarrel over the seduction of a queen, he was true to the Bronze Age.

A Mycenaean stirrup vase from the 14th century BCE

This is not to say that Helen really existed: we have no proof of that. But some of the names in Homer and Greek myth are found in Linear B or Hittite texts. For instance, the name Achilles appears in Linear B. The Hittite texts refer to Attarrisiya from Ahhiyawa, perhaps the Greek Atreus (the name of Agamemnon's father), and Tawagalawa, a brother of the king of Ahhiyawa. Today, many scholars would equate Tawagalawa with Eteocles in Greek myth, a king of the Greek city of Thebes. In Homer, one of the great princes of Troy is known both as Paris and Alexander. Hittite sources refer to a Trojan king named Alaksandu and also to the name Pari-zitis.

Taking a city by storm or siege was very expensive. It's not surprising that Hittite and Mesopotamian texts refer to tricks used to capture an enemy city, such as pretending to withdraw an army only to sweep back in on a foe that had let down its guard. There is no evidence that the Trojan Horse was real - that the Greeks really feigned their departure from Troy and left a wooden horse behind to get the Trojans to open their gates, but such a trick fits the spirit of Bronze-Age warfare.



Mycenaean palaces were at the centre of most cities

**Artemis**

**Goddess of the hunt and childbirth**

The twin of Apollo, she was a sworn virgin and protected young women's virtue.

**Hephaestus**

**God of the forge and craftsmanship**

Though crippled, he forged the gods' weapons. Wed to Aphrodite, their relationship was unhappy.

**Athena**

**Goddess of wisdom**

Patron of the Greeks and especially of Achilles and Diomedes, she rejected an appeal from the Trojans.

**Hermes**

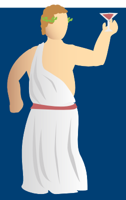
**God of travel and liars, messenger of the gods**

Patron of the Greeks, although he was said to have helped Trojan King Priam on one occasion.

**Demeter**

**Goddess of agriculture**

Hades took her daughter, Persephone, as wife for winter, during which Demeter refused to produce food.



**Dionysus**

**God of wine, liberation, and theatre**

A god whose status as an Olympian was in question with Hestia's. He loved festivities.

**Hestia**

**Goddess of the hearth**

One of Cronus's daughters, she is sometimes replaced by Dionysus as one of the Twelve Olympians.

# THE SEARCH FOR TROY

## Archaeologists have scoured Anatolia in the hunt for the mythical city. After years of excavation and speculation, it may have been found

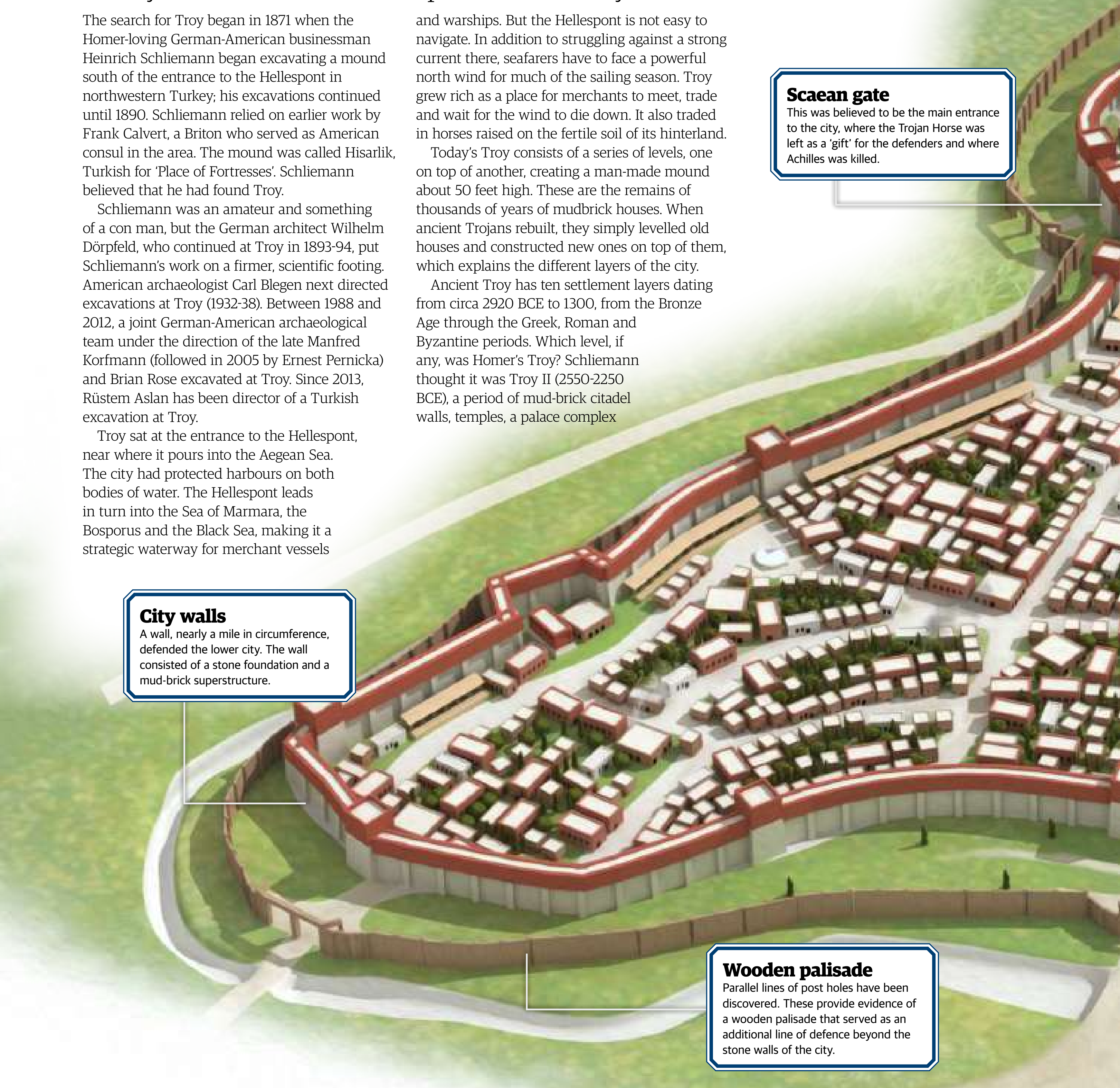
The search for Troy began in 1871 when the Homer-loving German-American businessman Heinrich Schliemann began excavating a mound south of the entrance to the Hellespont in northwestern Turkey; his excavations continued until 1890. Schliemann relied on earlier work by Frank Calvert, a Briton who served as American consul in the area. The mound was called Hisarlik, Turkish for 'Place of Fortresses'. Schliemann believed that he had found Troy.

Schliemann was an amateur and something of a con man, but the German architect Wilhelm Dörpfeld, who continued at Troy in 1893-94, put Schliemann's work on a firmer, scientific footing. American archaeologist Carl Blegen next directed excavations at Troy (1932-38). Between 1988 and 2012, a joint German-American archaeological team under the direction of the late Manfred Korfmann (followed in 2005 by Ernest Pernicka) and Brian Rose excavated at Troy. Since 2013, Rüstem Aslan has been director of a Turkish excavation at Troy.

Troy sat at the entrance to the Hellespont, near where it pours into the Aegean Sea. The city had protected harbours on both bodies of water. The Hellespont leads in turn into the Sea of Marmara, the Bosporus and the Black Sea, making it a strategic waterway for merchant vessels and warships. But the Hellespont is not easy to navigate. In addition to struggling against a strong current there, seafarers have to face a powerful north wind for much of the sailing season. Troy grew rich as a place for merchants to meet, trade and wait for the wind to die down. It also traded in horses raised on the fertile soil of its hinterland.

Today's Troy consists of a series of levels, one on top of another, creating a man-made mound about 50 feet high. These are the remains of thousands of years of mudbrick houses. When ancient Trojans rebuilt, they simply levelled old houses and constructed new ones on top of them, which explains the different layers of the city.

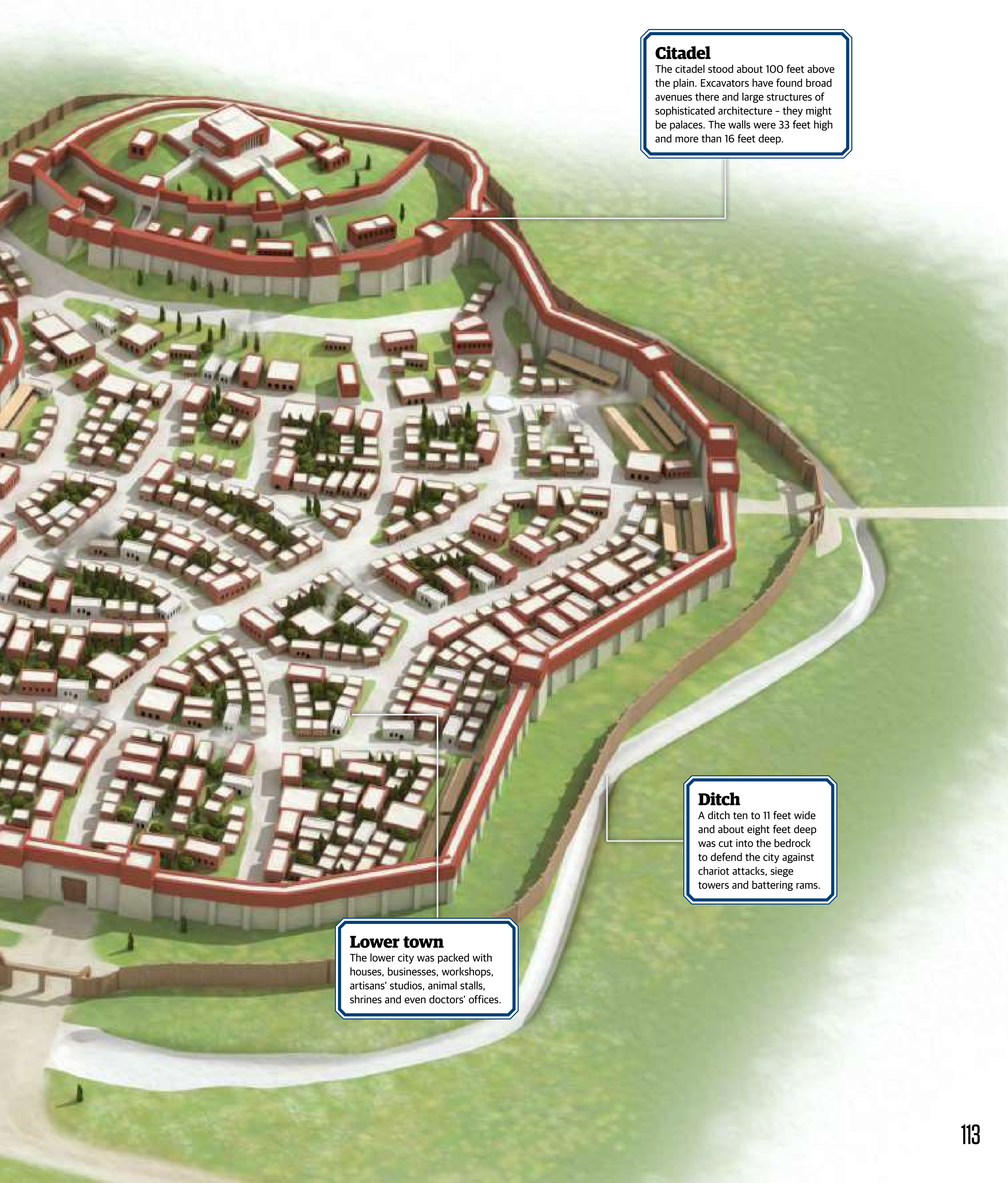
Ancient Troy has ten settlement layers dating from circa 2920 BCE to 1300, from the Bronze Age through the Greek, Roman and Byzantine periods. Which level, if any, was Homer's Troy? Schliemann thought it was Troy II (2550-2250 BCE), a period of mud-brick citadel walls, temples, a palace complex



**Scaean gate**
This was believed to be the main entrance to the city, where the Trojan Horse was left as a 'gift' for the defenders and where Achilles was killed.

**City walls**
A wall, nearly a mile in circumference, defended the lower city. The wall consisted of a stone foundation and a mud-brick superstructure.

**Wooden palisade**
Parallel lines of post holes have been discovered. These provide evidence of a wooden palisade that served as an additional line of defence beyond the stone walls of the city.



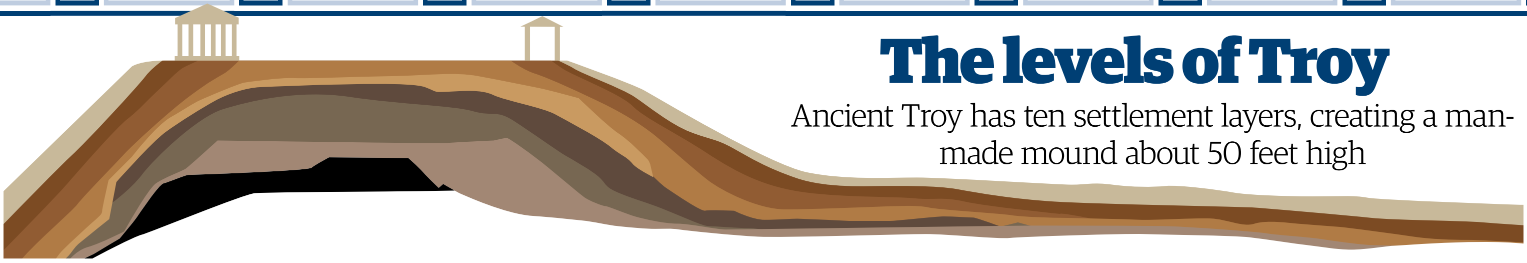
**Citadel**
The citadel stood about 100 feet above the plain. Excavators have found broad avenues there and large structures of sophisticated architecture – they might be palaces. The walls were 33 feet high and more than 16 feet deep.

**Ditch**
A ditch ten to 11 feet wide and about eight feet deep was cut into the bedrock to defend the city against chariot attacks, siege towers and battering rams.

**Lower town**
The lower city was packed with houses, businesses, workshops, artisans' studios, animal stalls, shrines and even doctors' offices.

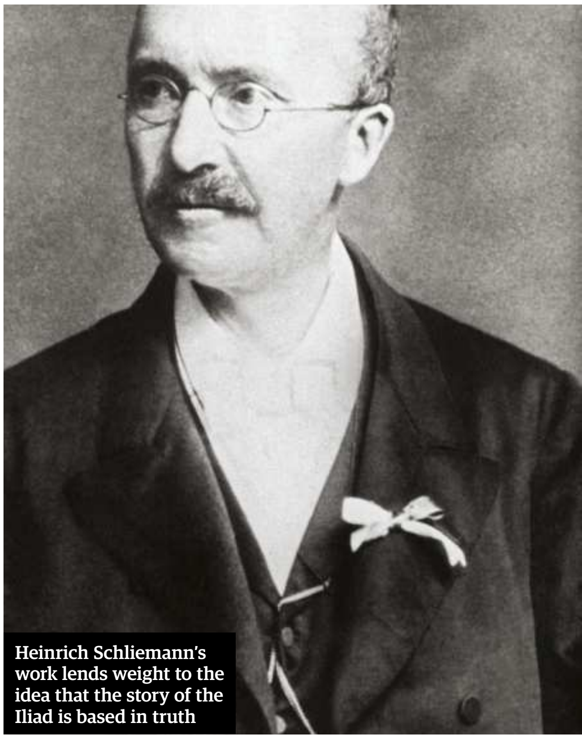
# The levels of Troy

Ancient Troy has ten settlement layers, creating a man-made mound about 50 feet high

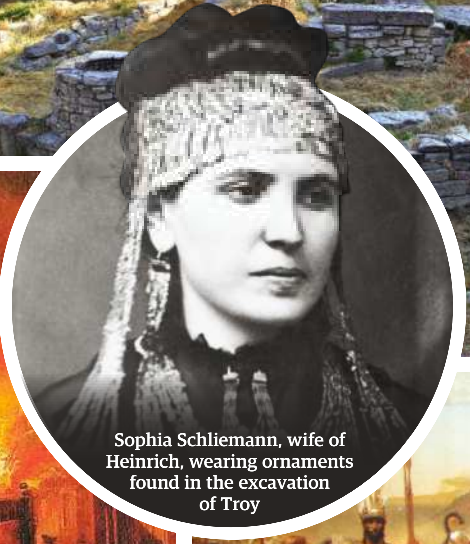


| LEVEL I | LEVEL II | LEVEL III | LEVEL IV/V | LEVEL VI | LEVEL VII-VIIB3 | LEVEL VIII | LEVEL IX | LEVEL X |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2920-2350 BCE | 2550-2250 BCE | 2250-2200 BCE | 2200-1740 BCE | 1740-1180 BCE | 1180-950 BCE | 700-85 BCE | 85 BCE-500 CE | 1100-1300 |
| The earliest settlement, small but wealthy, concentrated on the citadel, fortified with gates. **Cause of destruction: rebuilding** | The so-called 'Burnt City', rebuilt the earlier level on a larger scale with an impressive citadel wall. 'Treasures of Priam' found. **Cause of destruction: fire** | A smaller-scale version of Level II with cultural continuity. **Cause of destruction: fire** | Anatolian-Trojan Culture introduced. Citadel expanded, economy shifts to hunting, more connections with central Turkey. **Cause of destruction: fire** | Golden Age of Troy; the city reached its maximum prosperity and extent. It was probably Homer's Troy. **Cause of destruction: fire, probably war** | Early-Iron-Age Troy was rebuilt on a smaller scale, mainly in the upper city, with influence from the Balkans. **Cause of destruction: abandonment** | Greek city of Ilion. Refounded by Greeks after being abandoned for 250 years. Ilion was sacked by Romans. **Cause of destruction: Roman conquest** | Roman city of Ilium. Boosted under Emperors Augustus and Hadrian, who saw Troy as the ancestral city of Rome. **Cause of destruction: earthquakes** | Byzantine Ilion A small community. **Cause of destruction: Ottoman conquest** |

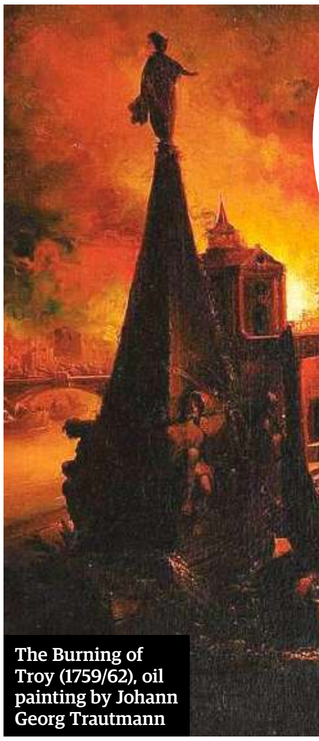
The archaeological site of the ancient city of Troy



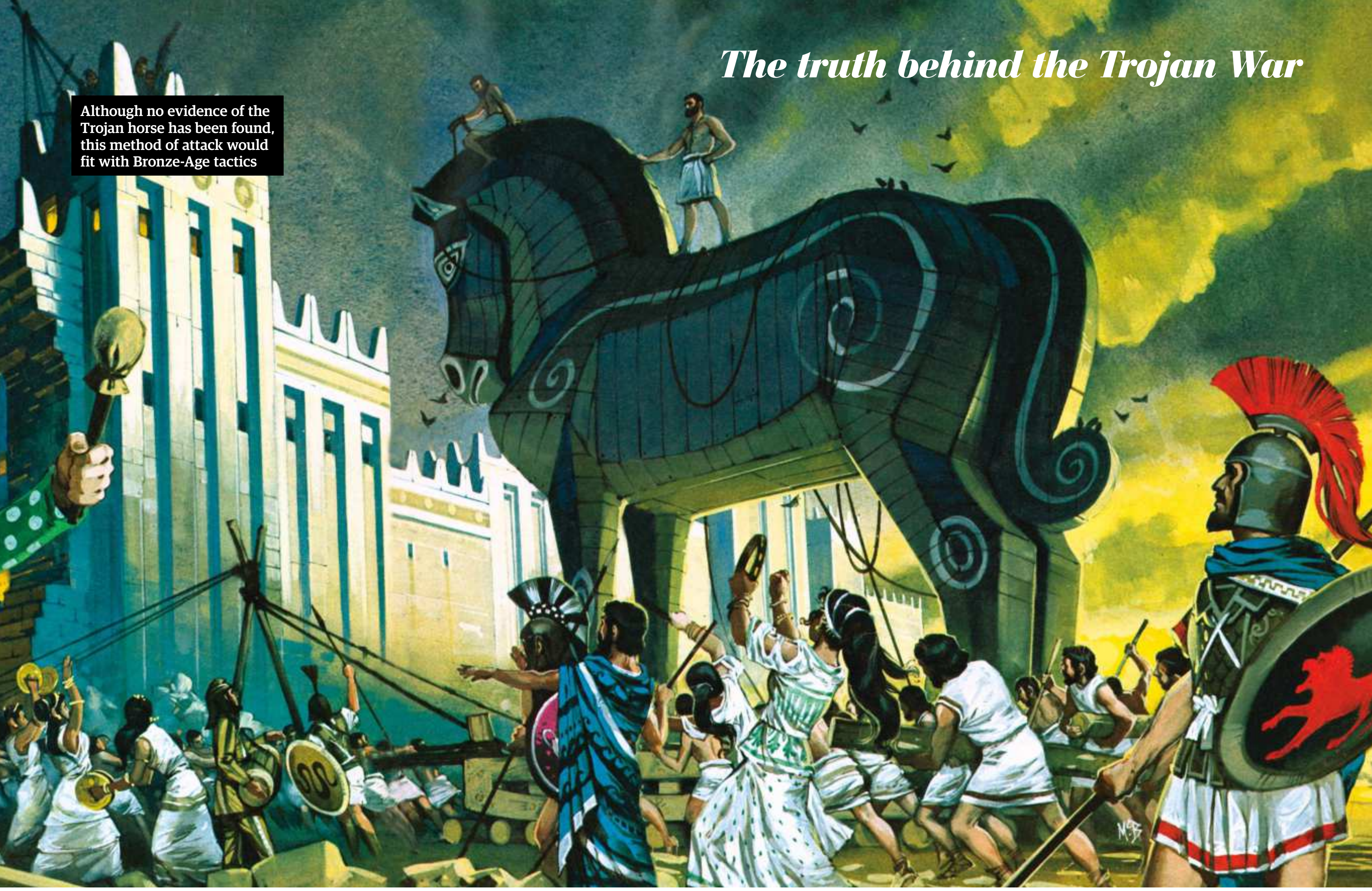
Heinrich Schliemann's work lends weight to the idea that the story of the Iliad is based in truth



Sophia Schliemann, wife of Heinrich, wearing ornaments found in the excavation of Troy



The Burning of Troy (1759/62), oil painting by Johann Georg Trautmann



Although no evidence of the Trojan horse has been found, this method of attack would fit with Bronze-Age tactics

and a massive ramp still impressive to visitors today. Schliemann also found sophisticated wheel-made pottery and more than 20 impressive so-called 'Treasures of Priam' of gold and other precious metals.

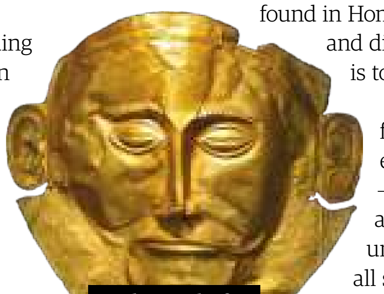
After excavating the massive fortifications of Troy's citadel, which he labelled Troy VI (1740-1180 BCE), Dörpfeld more credibly identified them with Homer's Troy. Generally considered the peak of ancient Trojan civilisation, it came about 1,000 years later than Schliemann had thought.

Blegen, who subdivided the levels further, changed the identification to Level VII, and the most recent excavators identify Homer's Troy as Level VI, which they date to 1300-1210/1180 BCE. However, the most important change lies less in the refinement of dating than in our overall understanding of the site.

Previously, scholars thought that Troy was only a small citadel, impressive in its stone fortification walls but only about half an acre in size. Thanks to the most recent excavations, we now know that Troy was, in fact, about 75 acres in size, with a large lower city beneath the citadel. The lower city was packed with houses, businesses, workshops, artisans' studios, animal stalls, shrines, and even doctors' offices. We estimate that several thousand people, no more than 10,000, lived in Troy.

A wall, nearly a mile in circumference, defended the lower city. The wall consisted of a stone foundation and a mud-brick superstructure. Outside the wall there was a ditch, cut into the bedrock, and a wooden palisade, to defend the city against chariot attacks. The lower city's defenders could avail themselves of fresh water from an underground stream - worshipped as a god - and reached through tunnels carved 500 feet into the rock.

The citadel walls traced a circumference of 1,150 feet standing about 33 feet high and more than 16 feet thick. Their 20-foot-high stone base sloped outward, making the walls difficult to climb. The stone base was topped with a 13-foot-high mud-brick superstructure. A 30-foot-high tower defended the South Gate, probably the citadel's main entrance.



The 'Mask of Agamemnon', discovered in 1876 by Schliemann

The new excavations have not gone without controversy. Critics suggested that the defensive trench was a drainage ditch and there is no shortage of candidates elsewhere in Turkey - and beyond - for the site of Troy. But the trench runs uphill, so it can hardly be a drainage ditch, and Hisarlik fits Homer's description of the site beautifully, which cannot be said of any other would-be Troy.

There was never good reason to doubt that some sort of Trojan War happened. After all, the ancient authors all believed in it, even the realist Thucydides, who challenged only the idea that it was fought over a woman rather than over power and wealth. The findings demonstrate the presence at Troy of a language related to Hittite, which strengthens the hints in Hittite texts that Troy was a Hittite ally. Hittite texts also demonstrate that Ahhiyawa, whose name strongly suggests the Achaeans - the Greeks found in Homer's works - engaged in war and diplomacy with Hittites on what is today the Turkish mainland.

Around 1180 BCE, a great fire destroyed Troy. The excavators have found weapons - arrowheads, spearheads and sling stones - as well as unburied human bones, which all suggest a sudden and violent attack. The towns around Troy, according to a recent survey, may have been abandoned around 1200 BCE, consistent with an invasion.

In short, archaeological and textual evidence provides considerable support to the tradition, unanimously believed by ancient writers, that Greeks attacked and sacked Troy. That wouldn't stand up as evidence in a criminal case in a court of law, but it is more than plausible.

Of course, it doesn't prove the existence of Helen or Achilles or any of the other characters of myth, but in various ways, from vendettas to raiding to cunning ploys to capture enemy cities, those characters echo the behaviour of people in the Late Bronze Age.

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# ART & CULTURE

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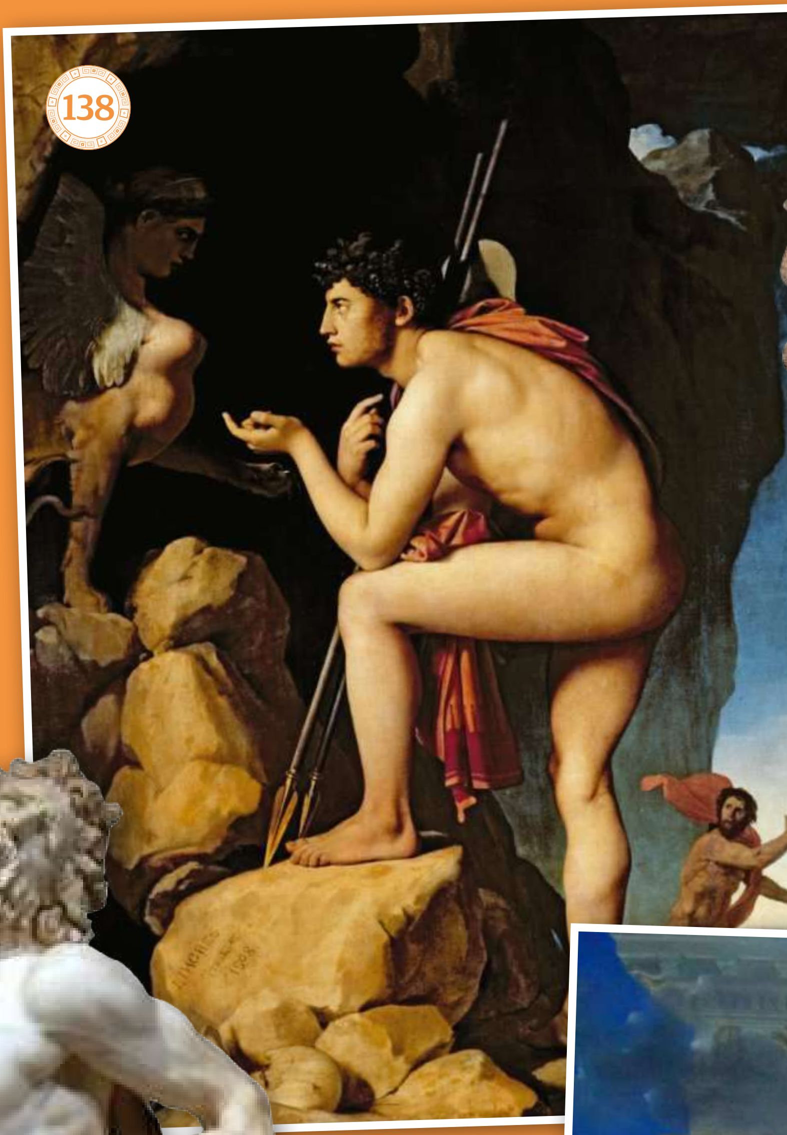

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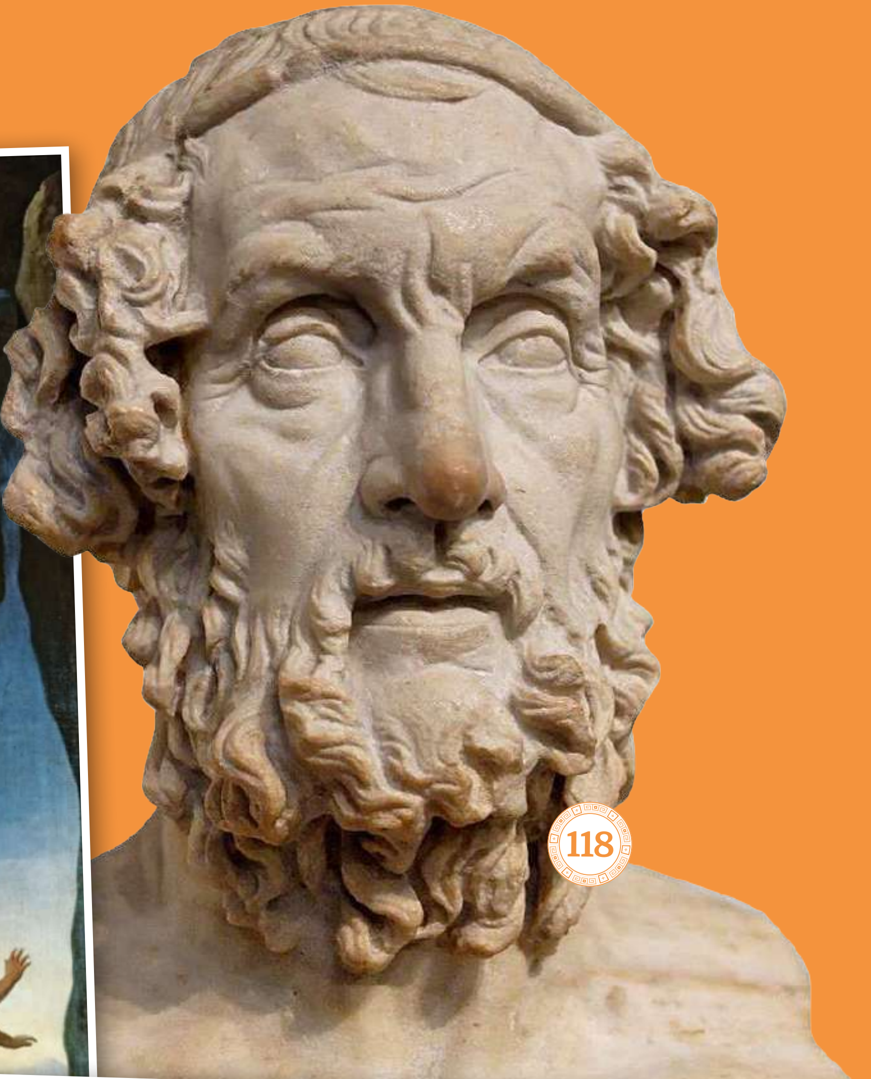

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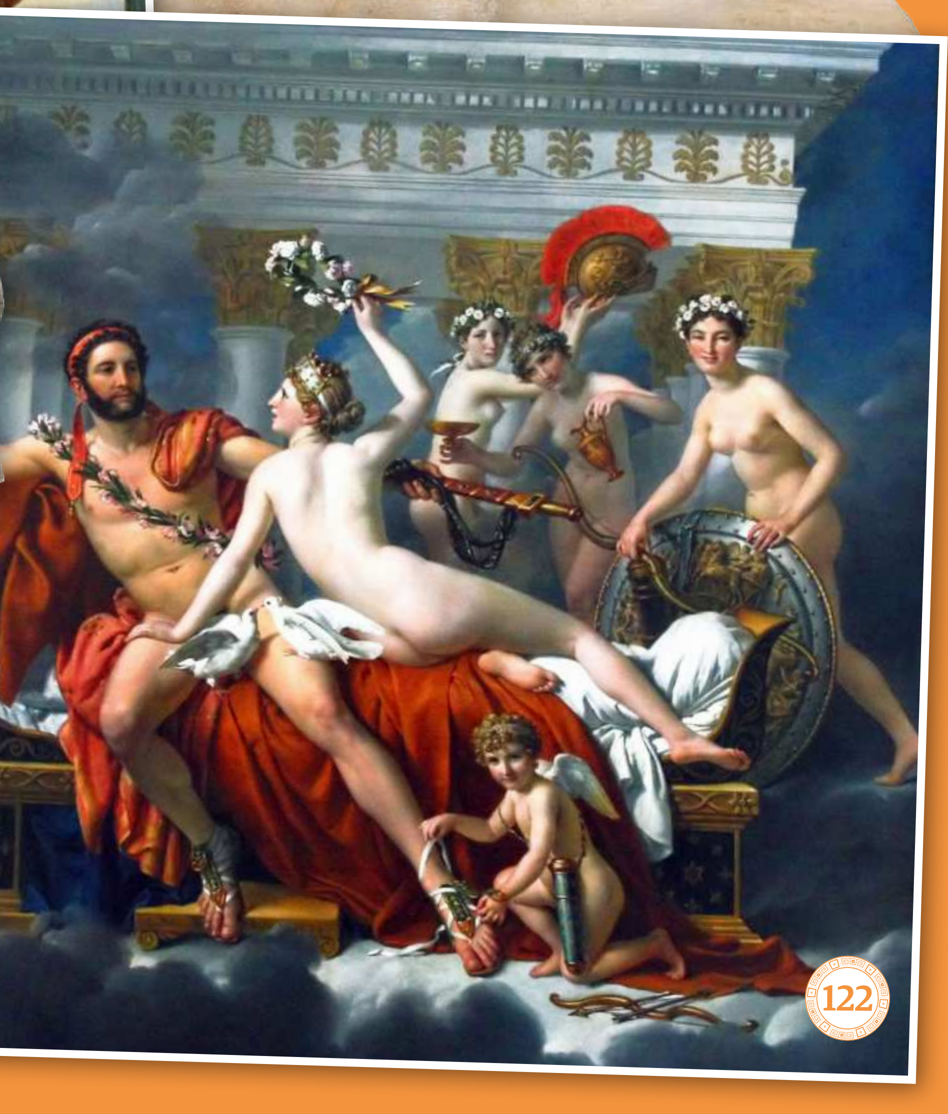

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# THE LEGEND OF HOMER

The Homeric poems are some of the earliest and most important written sources for Greek mythology, but Homer is something of a mythical figure himself

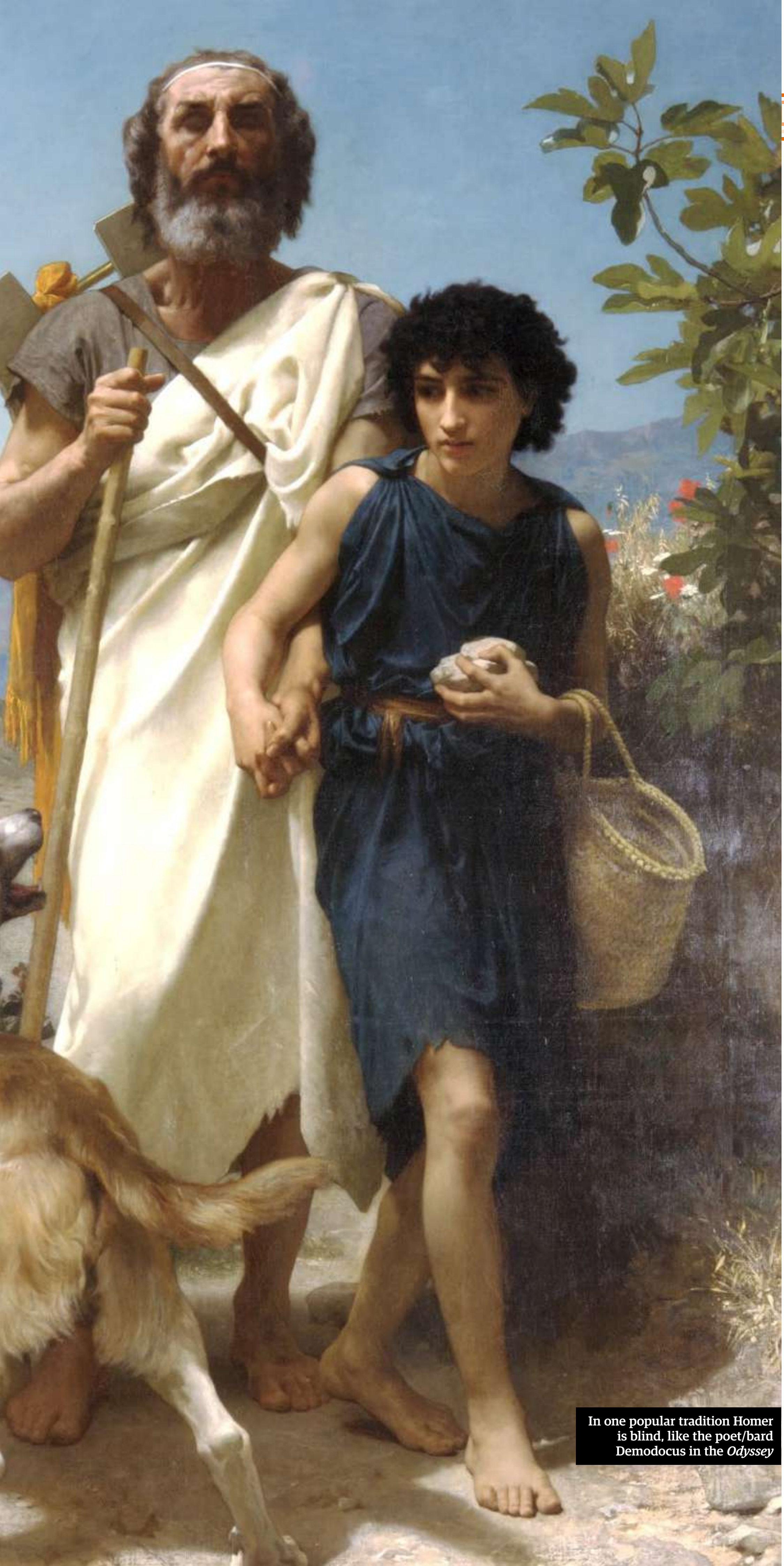
Homer stands at the beginning of European literature and was the most important figure in ancient Greek cultural history. The Homeric poems were memorised, quoted from, consulted, appealed to, publicly recited by professional readers ('rhapsodes') and taught throughout Antiquity. They transcended the many disunited cities and communities of the Greeks; they all reverenced Homer. In the absence of anything like a Bible, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* had a peculiar authority and importance.

The Homeric poems are, alongside Hesiod's *Theogony*, the earliest written sources for Greek myths. None were more important or influential. Some have even said that Homer gave the Greeks their gods. Hesiod may have provided a more structured description, but Homer didn't just assign them their official roles, he gave them characters and foibles - he gave them life. He described them in quite a domestic setting in Olympus, feuding, squabbling, currying favour, manoeuvring for advantage, tricking one another and committing adultery. On Earth he showed them outright fighting, though only when Zeus gave them permission. There are graver, more 'spiritual' moments in the poems, but this pageant of the gods had an enduring effect on how the Greeks saw their deities and viewed their myths, beyond Homer's different versions of the stories themselves.

In Homer, the gods were just like mortals in their behaviour, their desires, their weaknesses and so on - except that men died and gods didn't, and gods were happy and men were not. For mortals, actions had permanent consequences, but for gods they would only be temporary. The gods could take sides in mortal affairs, as they did - passionately - in the Trojan War, but when the action was over they could return to their nectar and ambrosia, and to their affairs, like sports fans after a match. Homer even has the gods watch the Greeks and Trojans fighting as if they were spectators following a chariot race.

For all the occasional lightness and humour of the gods' antics, this contrast was part of a characteristically Greek tragic vision of life. A later Roman writer said that Homer made his men gods

The *Illiad* and the *Odyssey* are two of the most famous and influential poems throughout history



In one popular tradition Homer is blind, like the poet/bard Demodocus in the *Odyssey*

and his gods men. There is an extra psychological and moral complexity to the mortal characters, perhaps because their actions have meaning, in the sense that they have consequences. There's a sense that this gives them a particular dignity. Further,more as fallible as some of the mortal heroes are, they are often referred to as 'god-like', and with reason. They have many of the attributes of the gods, all except for immortality.

Not all later thinkers approved of Homer's vision. In the 4th century BCE, Plato barred Homer from his ideal republic because of his portrayal of the gods. Plato also emphasised just how influential poets - and, above all, Homer - were in forming people's views. It is clear that Homer's poems did much to influence the Greeks' views of their own ancient myths - ancient to them as well as us - and their place in the cosmos. There were heroic mortals, always striving to be the best, and capricious gods who could take everything away from them in a moment.

Given how fundamental the myths were to Greek life and literature, and how much overlap there was between mythology and religion, Homer's place in Greek culture was immense.

## A poem of war

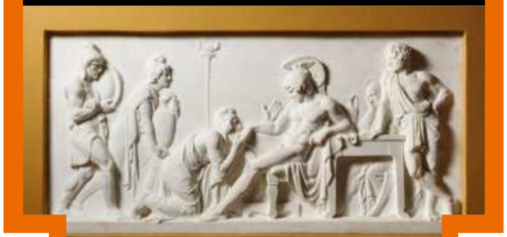
The *Iliad* spans just a few weeks of the ten-year Trojan War and deals with a single episode in which the pre-eminent Greek hero, Achilles, falls out with Agamemnon, the king of Mycenae, and withdraws from the fighting.

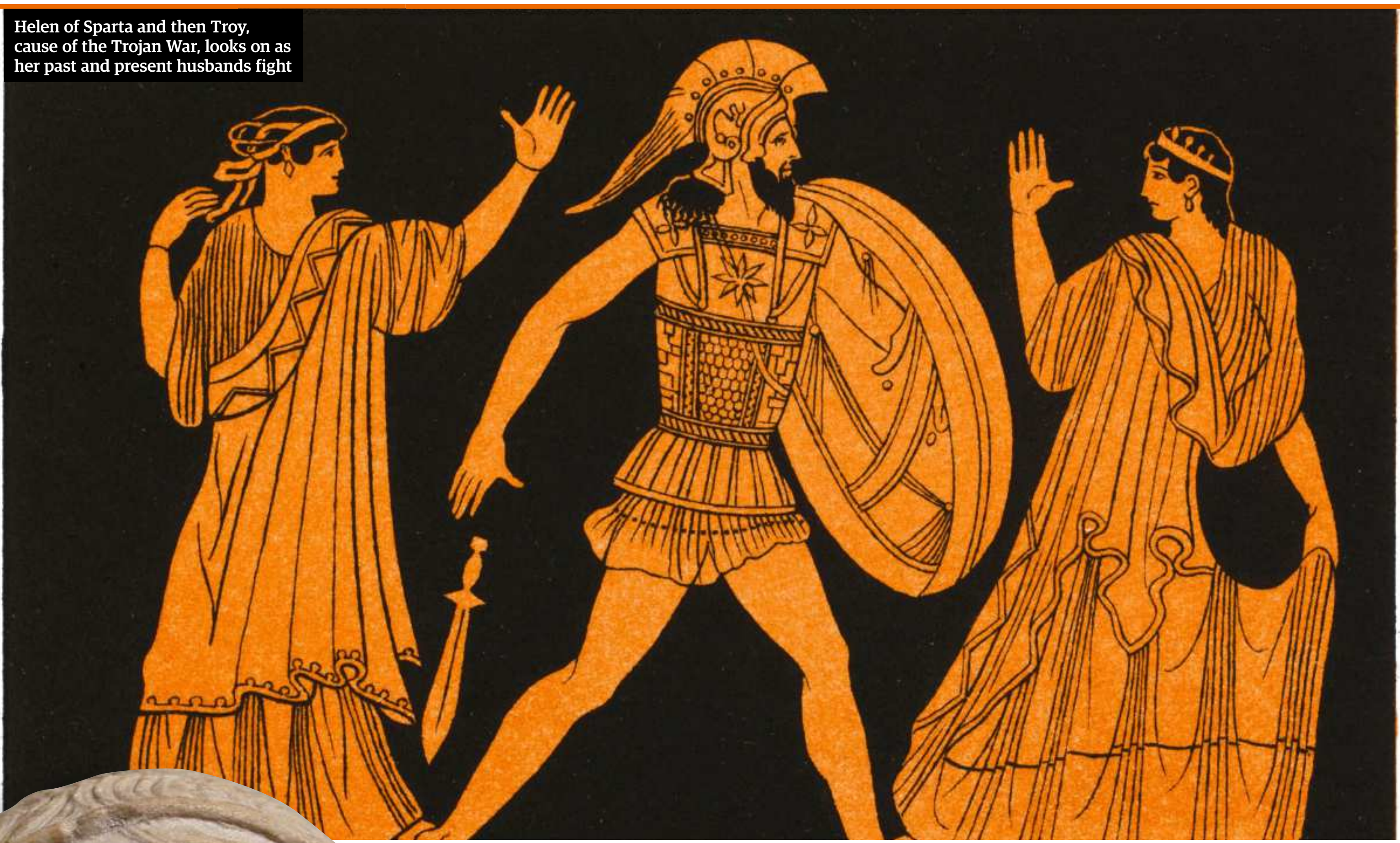
Although it's a long poem – it would have taken as many as 30 hours for a bard to sing – it's fast paced. The action centres on ferocious fighting between the Greeks and Trojans, with the Trojans gaining temporary ascendancy through their hero Hector and, more than that, the passing favour of Zeus.

The Greeks plead with Achilles to return to battle, but he refuses until circumstances change his mind. His return ends with him killing Hector, whose body he sacrilegiously defiles. Hector's father, King Priam of Troy, then begs Achilles for the return of Hector's body, which he grants in a brief moment of reconciliation and shared humanity. The poem then ends with Greek and Trojan funerals.

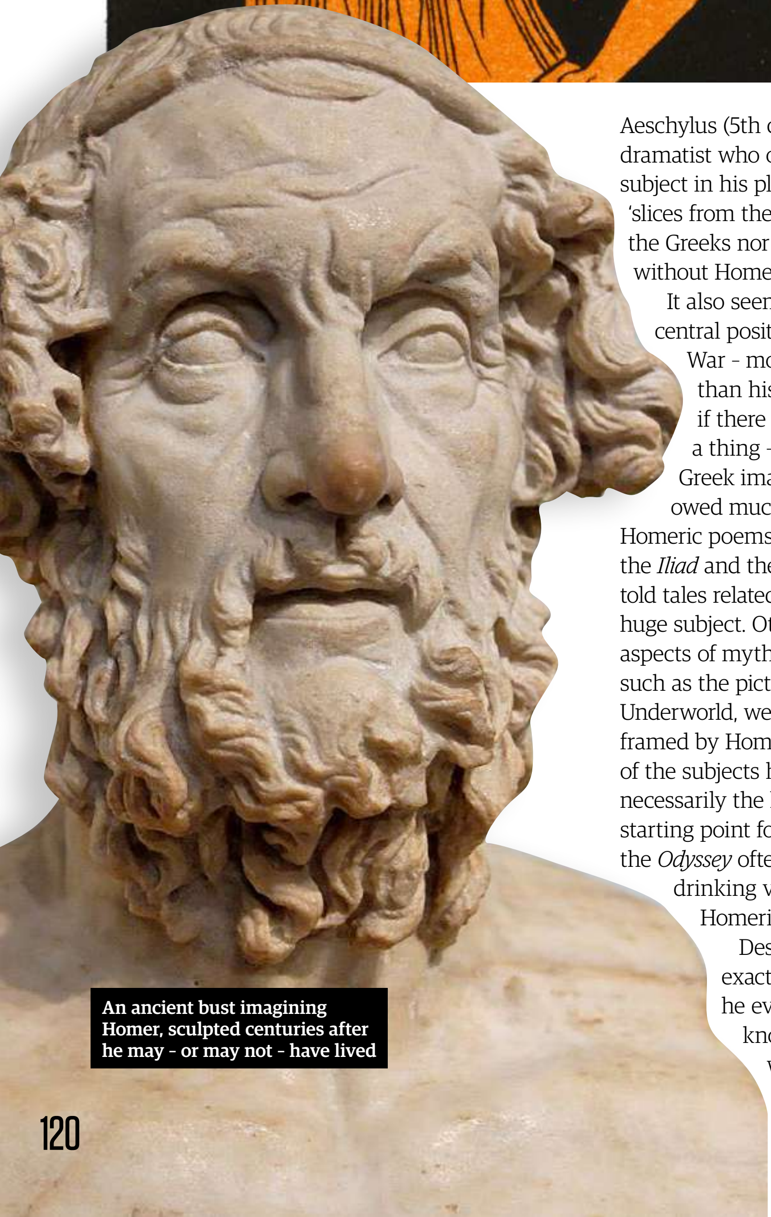
Despite the fact that 264 people die in the *Iliad*, it's also full of the pleasures of life: food, drink, companionship and sex. The ending is especially poignant because the audience knows that things will end badly for almost everyone in the poem.

The Trojan king Priam asks the Greek hero Achilles for the body of his son, whom Achilles had slain





Helen of Sparta and then Troy, cause of the Trojan War, looks on as her past and present husbands fight



An ancient bust imagining Homer, sculpted centuries after he may - or may not - have lived

Aeschylus (5th century BCE), the great Athenian dramatist who only once used a non-mythological subject in his plays, said that his tragedies were 'slices from the great banquet of Homer'. Neither the Greeks nor their myths would be the same without Homer.

It also seems likely that the central position of the Trojan War - more mythical than historical, even if there was such a thing - in the Greek imagination owed much to the Homeric poems. Both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* told tales related to that huge subject. Other specific aspects of mythology, such as the picture of the Underworld, were also partially framed by Homer. His versions of the subjects he touched were not necessarily the last word, but they were often the starting point for others. Scenes from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* often featured in visual art, and even drinking vessels might include references to Homeric subjects.

Despite all of this, we don't know exactly who Homer was, or whether he even existed. We don't even really know what we mean by 'Homer'. Do we mean a real person? Possibly two people? A legend? A tradition, or perhaps a sort of committee or collective of poets? The personification of two poems?

These aren't new questions - similar doubts bothered and intrigued the Greeks from at least the late 6th century BCE. Above all they were concerned with who Homer was and which city could take credit for him. They also examined which poems could properly be attributed to Homer, and they reduced the various texts of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* - the only two universally accepted Homeric poems even in the ancient world - to single canonical versions. The ancient biographies ranged from plausible through wishful thinking up to fantastical. Many were influenced by political concerns - whichever city could claim Homer as their own would gain enormous prestige. Some cities tried similar patriotic ploys when their scholars worked on definitive versions of the texts; for example, the Athenians tried to emphasise their role in the Trojan War.

Fora long time, it was believed that the *Illiad* was actually written by multiple authors instead of just one

Seven cities claimed Homer as their own: Smyrna, Chios, Colophon, Ithaca, Pylos, Argos and Athens. Homer's language - a predominantly Asiatic dialect of Greek - and apparent familiarity with the area around Hisarlik in modern Turkey

> "The ancient biographies ranged from plausible through to fantastical"

point to one of the first three as being most likely, if any of the claims are true.

Homer was also claimed as the author of various works in addition to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, such as the religious poems known as the *Homeric Hymns*, a number of comic poems and some inferior epic poetry. However, even in the ancient period it came to be thought that he was only certainly the author of the first two.

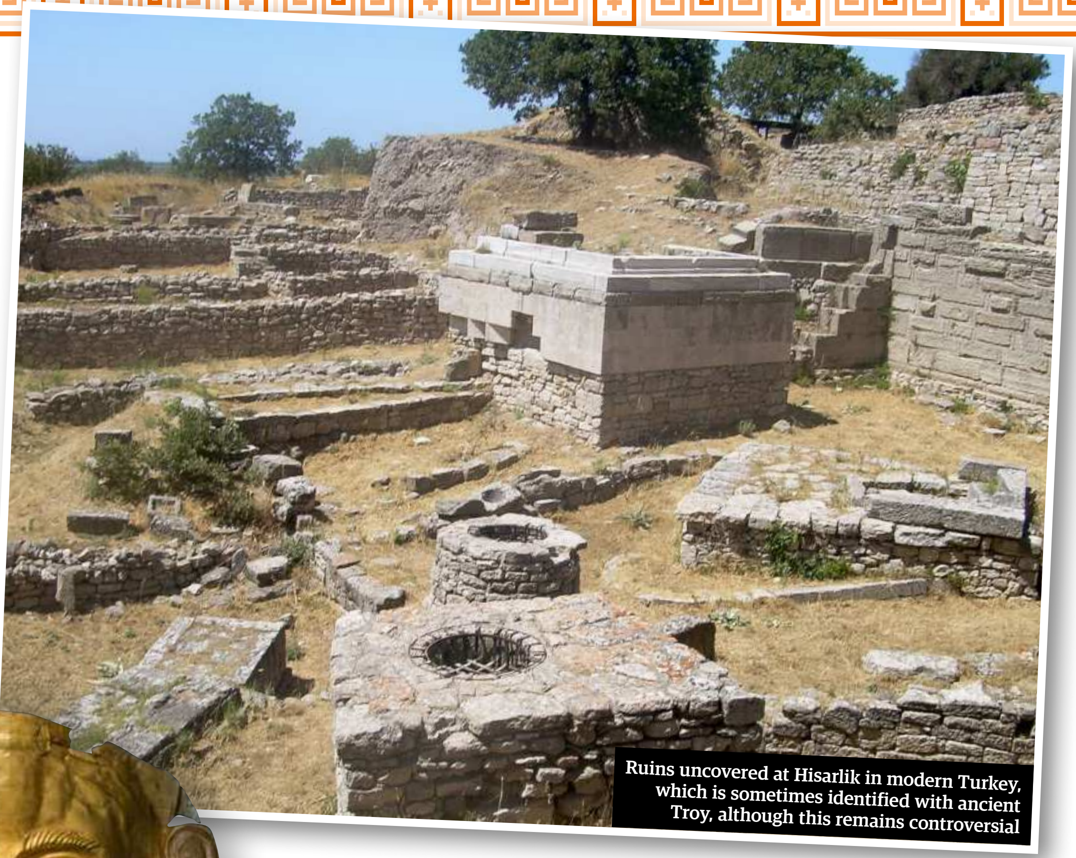
Despite the fundamental enigma of Homer, even in the ancient world, the biographies certainly weren't shy of providing details. In one popular tradition he was blind, like the bard Demodocus in the *Odyssey*. The blind were thought to be inspired and to see things with their minds that were denied to their eyes. The further the biographers were from Homer in time, it seemed, the more extravagant and detailed their stories became. By the 5th century BCE, Homeric scholarship and pseudo-scholarship was booming. They're actually still booming now.

What, then, do we know, or think we know, about Homer now? It's almost certain that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are the culmination of a tradition of oral poetry, in which stories were passed from generation to generation in songs. If there was a Trojan War of some kind, it probably occurred some time around 1200 BCE, possibly earlier. The *Iliad* was probably written in the late 8th century, or perhaps later. The *Odyssey* may have been written between 20 and 50 years after. Many scholars argue that they were composed by different authors, but some disagree. They do differ in terms of language and approach – even Aristotle thought the *Odyssey* was a late work by the same poet – but the evidence is definitely far from conclusive.

The language of the poems is unique. No one ever spoke it. Combining words of different regional dialects – despite the dominance of Eastern Greek – and periods, it was a hybrid. Some words don't appear anywhere else in writing. Some are very ancient indeed. There are practical reasons for this to do with getting the right number of syllables into the lines of verse, and the practices of oral poetry, but the effect would have been to make the poems seem not only ancient, but even strange at the time. And, after all, the world they describe was probably at least 500 years old, and had been passed on to them by a sort of artistic Chinese whispers for generation after generation.

The world of the poems is also a mix of the old and new. Bronze Age and Iron Age technologies and practices mingle. The influence of the older Mycenean of roughly 1600–1100 BCE, is clear but not always understood – the poet of the *Iliad* clearly doesn't understand how chariots were used in battle, for example. At other times, defunct practices are represented accurately. It makes sense to see the poems as very old traditional stories that have been written up by a poet or poets who only partly understand their material – however well they understand human nature – and they have added details from their own world.

There are many suggestive details, and we can make some very well-educated guesses, but ultimately the who, what and when of Homer are unknowable. The one thing that is certain is that 'many-minded Homer', as he was sometimes called, composed poems that transcended their time and place. In fact, in the broadness of his sympathies and perspective, he seems rather more god-like than his own gods. Greeks and Trojans alike, women, and even slaves were all treated sympathetically and with humanity, and despite the violence of both poems, there are scenes of touching warmth, empathy and pathos. Homer can't be confined to a single people, place or time.


Ruins uncovered at Hisarlik in modern Turkey, which is sometimes identified with ancient Troy, although this remains controversial

A golden death mask discovered at the site of ancient Mycenae. This is the face of the Greek warriors of the Trojan War

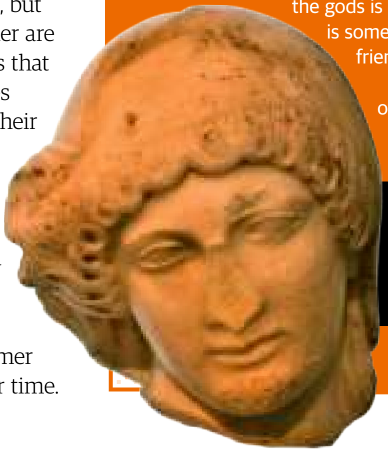
## Finding the way home

After the Trojan War ends with a Greek victory, it takes Odysseus ten years to return home. Along the way, he is imprisoned by an amorous goddess and by a man-eating Cyclops; shipwrecked; sent to the Underworld to ask the dead for advice; tormented by the music of the Sirens; and generally buffeted, harassed and delayed in some of the most famous adventures of all time.

In parallel, his faithful and enterprising wife, Penelope, is waiting for his return and trying to keep their home intact, while their son, Telemachus, is only just coming of age.

For all Odysseus' voyaging, the focus is on home, which he longs for, while his family longs for his return. It's the opposite of the well-worn story in which a young hero goes in search of adventure – he isn't young and he doesn't want adventures; he just wants to get home.

Odysseus was pre-eminent among the heroes of Greek mythology for cunning, eloquence and wit, though he was also a fighter. His patron among the gods is Athena, and there is something quite like friendship between them. Although the ending of the *Odyssey* is bloody, and even cruel, it is still happy.


Penelope, Odysseus' wife, was one of the most famous women of antiquity, and was a byword for loyalty and intelligence

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# ART AND MYTH

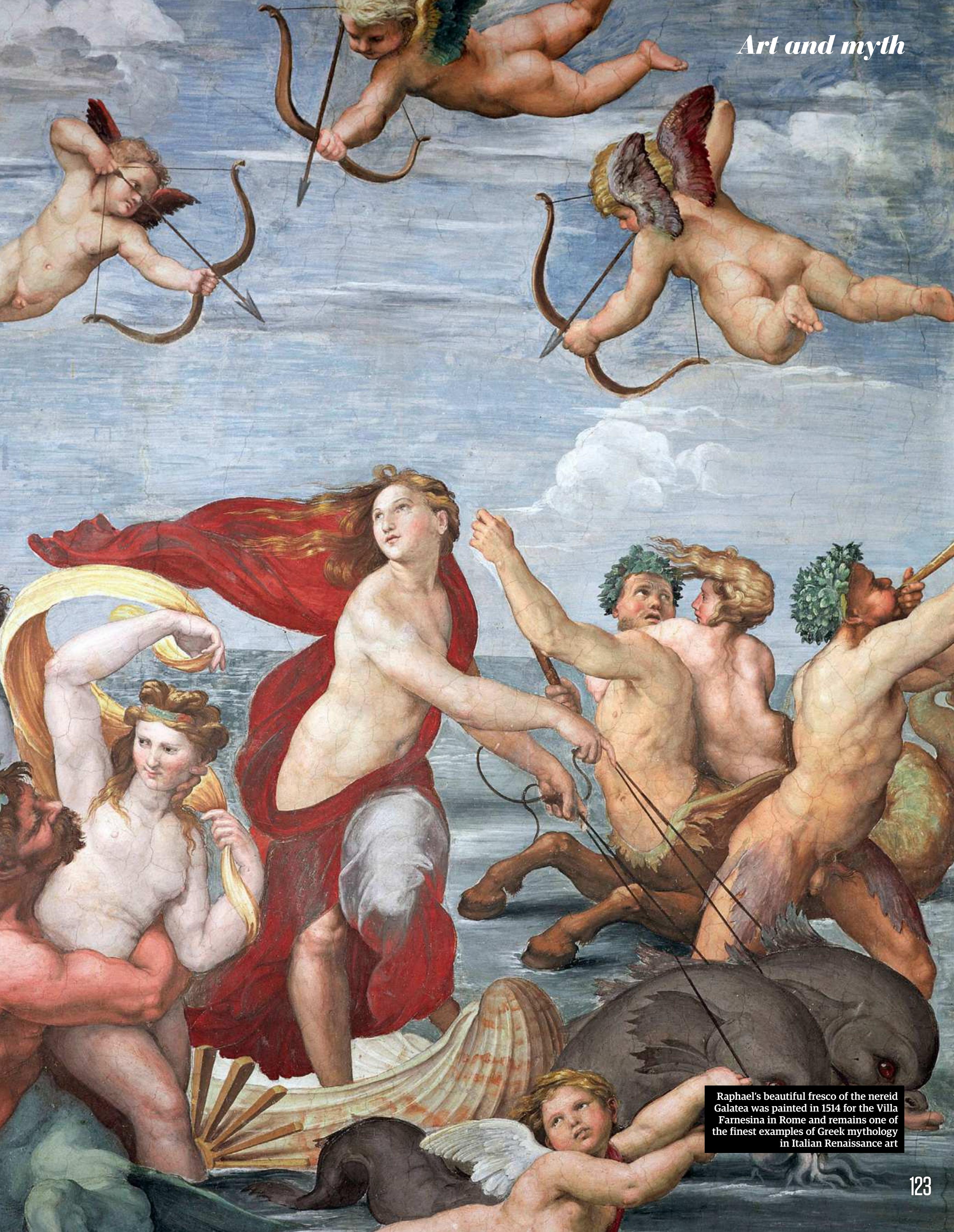
Since the dawn of time, mythology has been one of the chief inspirations behind art and literature, but none have been so influential as the Greek myths

The poetry of Ovid became one of the biggest influences on the imaginations of artists and poets

Although they were first told thousands of years ago, the myths created by the ancient Greeks still maintain a profound hold on our imaginations and continue to inspire art and literature today. Every gallery, museum and stately home is crammed full of pieces inspired by Greek mythology, depicting cavorting deities, flawed heroes, tragic heroines and using the stories woven by our Greek forefathers to evoke themes that have remained relatable and pertinent throughout the centuries. The Greeks used their mythological tales to help explain the inexplicable, as well as to provide entertainment, but above all they formed the lynchpin to their religious beliefs and practices.

However, while these deities were worshipped and revered by the Greeks, they were never regarded as infallible or perfect. The gods, goddesses and heroes celebrated in these ancient tales were all too human. They fell in and out of love, they had arguments with family and friends, they suffered defeats and celebrated triumphs. This relatibility made them all the more beloved by the Greeks, who regarded the inhabitants of Mount Olympus as something akin to a quarrelsome extended family, and gives these ancient tales a timelessness that has ensured their popularity for centuries since their creation.

Although many of the stories told by the ancient Greeks have long since vanished, a surprisingly large amount still exist, in part thanks to the Romans, who cheerfully plundered Greek art and literature for themes and styles - to the extent that it is often hard to tell the two apart. However, while the Romans were copying the Greeks, they were also preserving their work for future generations - it is thanks to the Roman passion for Greek theatre, in particular the tragedies that are now believed to have been performed as an extension of sacred Dionysiun rites, that the works of Euripides,



Raphael's beautiful fresco of the nereid Galatea was painted in 1514 for the Villa Farnesina in Rome and remains one of the finest examples of Greek mythology in Italian Renaissance art

Sophocles and Aeschylus are still available to read today. Their plays, along with the writings of Homer, who wove mythology into his epic retelling of the fall of Troy and journeys of Odysseus, were enormously popular with the Romans and ensured that the ancient tales were not forgotten.

This interest in the mythology of the ancient Greeks was cemented by the poetry of Ovid, who was active during the reign of Augustus and a contemporary of Virgil and Horace. Ovid's most celebrated and popular work remains his *Metamorphoses*, an epic narrative poem that claimed to chronicle the history of the world, blending known facts with a healthy dash of mythology. It incorporated over 250 myths and brought now familiar tales like the doomed romance of Narcissus and Echo and the ill-fated marriage of Jason and Medea to a new audience. The Romans were fascinated by these vivid, romantic, dramatic tales and quickly assimilated them into their artistic vernacular, using them to inspire art and literature of their own. This interest in Greek mythology, encouraged by the popularity of Ovid, also meant that the Romans were able to fully appreciate the incredible pieces of Hellenistic Greek art that they were acquiring – especially sculpture, which included such revered works as the original bronze *Apollo Belvedere* (the famous marble version is a Roman copy) and the incredible *Laocöon and his Sons*, which was brought from Greece and resided in the imperial palace.

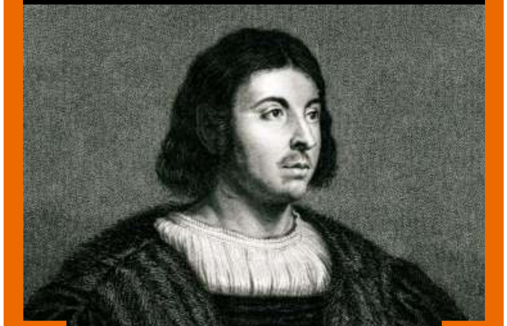
Thanks to the ongoing popularity of Ovid and the other Roman writers, such as Virgil, who also plundered these ancient stories for inspiration, the Greek myths were not lost even after the fall of Rome and end of the classical period. However, with the rise of Christianity, such secular and often frankly sensual subject matter was very much frowned upon and artists were actively discouraged from making actual depictions of the Greek myths, with their drunk and fornicating deities, violent quarrels, vengeful women and hideous monsters. Followers of Christianity were very clear that there was only one God and made no secret of their contempt for the old pagan religious beliefs, which were, they said a reflection of the degeneracy and moral turpitude of the ancients.

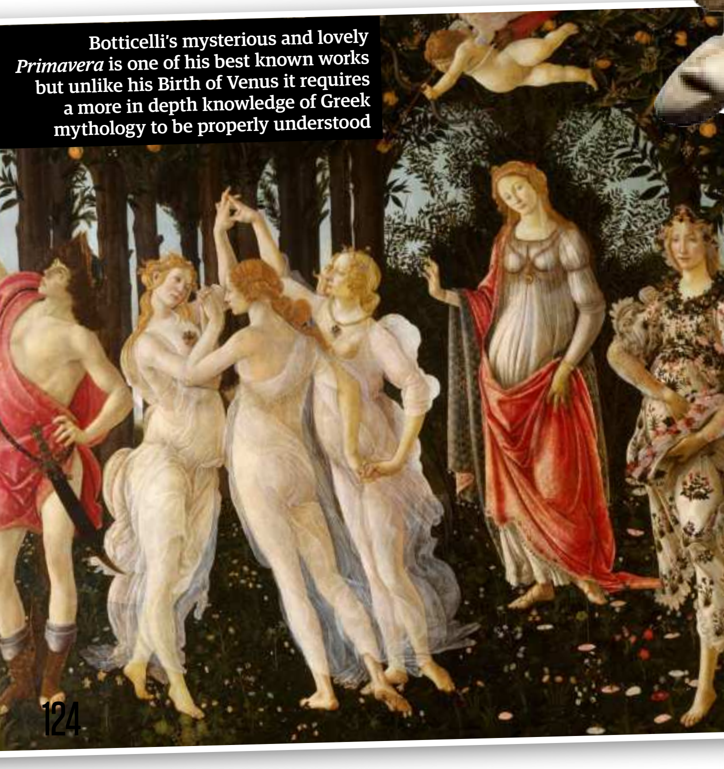
Although interest in mythology never quite disappeared, artists were now encouraged to paint and sculpt scenes from the Bible, which were considered far more wholesome and edifying, and from this point until the Renaissance, the primary purpose of art was to glorify God and honour the Christian church. Artistic depictions of Greek mythology were effectively outlawed until the middle of the 14th century, when the writings of Italian scholar and poet Petrarch reignited an interest in the ancient myths. Petrarch's correspondent and fellow humanist Boccaccio was also inspired by Greek mythology and his 1360 *Genealogia Deorum Gentilium*, an encyclopedic summary of the often confusing intertwined relationships between the ancient gods and their mortal associates, was to remain one of the most authorative texts about Ancient Greek myths for the next two centuries. Boccaccio's book was well timed – artists were becoming restless and

## Giovanni Boccaccio

The writer, poet and humanist Giovanni Boccaccio was born in Certaldo near Florence in 1313 and, thanks to his wealthy middle-class origins, enjoyed an excellent education, which enabled him to study Law and widen his interest in other scholarly pursuits as well as develop correspondences with other prominent academics. He quickly developed a great interest in the works of Homer, which would eventually lead him to create the first Latin translations of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, making them available to a vast new audience. He also translated the works of Euripides and Aristotle from the original Greek and, encouraged by his friend Petrarch, wrote the hugely popular and influential *Genealogia Deorum Gentilium*, which untangled the often complicated – if not downright incestuous – relationships between the inhabitants of the Greek and Roman pantheons of the gods. Nowadays he is perhaps best known for his collection of novellas, *The Decameron*, which contains 100 stories, most of which deal with various different types of love. After a long, very respected and fruitful career, Boccaccio died at home in Certaldo in 1375.

**Few writers were as influential during the Italian Renaissance as Boccaccio, who devoted his life to the study of ancient texts**





**Botticelli's mysterious and lovely *Primavera* is one of his best known works but unlike his Birth of Venus it requires a more in depth knowledge of Greek mythology to be properly understood**

**The ancient sculpture of the doomed Trojan priest Laocoön and his sons was discovered in Rome in 1506 and immediately began to inspire artists and sculptors**

dissatisfied with the emphasis on religious subject matter and were keen to be inspired by fresh ideas. As the movement that would become known as the Renaissance began to spread through Italy and then to the rest of continental Europe and writers and scholars began to talk about the ideals of Humanism, which in itself was based on the ideas of the Greek philosopher Plato, there was a renewed interest in the mythology of the ancient Greeks.

Like their Roman ancestors, Renaissance Italians were drawn to these boisterous stories about the Greek deities and saw them as an important counterpoint to the Christian tales that had dominated culture for the past few hundred years, during what was now beginning to be called the 'dark ages'. This new generation looked to the ancient Greeks for inspiration, appreciating their philosophy, art and, above all, florid mythological tales, which had served as the background for their religious beliefs. It did not take long before artists began to incorporate these new influences into their work, often intertwining ancient Greek and Christian symbolism to create something entirely new.

With the rise of humanism and the belief that it was the duty of everyone to truly know themselves and strive to reach their full potential, this mixture of Greek mythology and Christianity in art was regarded as symbolic of the inner turmoil of the human state, of the constant battle between the sacred and the profane that exists within everyone. Eventually though, artists would feel emboldened to paint Greek mythological scenes without any Christian context, appreciating the still vibrant and relevant old tales for their own sake and taking advantage of the fact that as time went on and the tales became better known, more people would know what the work depicted. In fact, as the Renaissance progressed, it became increasingly desirable to have at least a working knowledge of the Greek myths, especially as depictions became more common, fuelled by the classical-inspired pieces commissioned by wealthy patrons such as the Medici family, who prided themselves on their erudition and believed that having a taste for Greek mythology was indicative of being truly cultured and well educated.

Although Christian themes still predominated, many of the finest pieces produced during the Renaissance were inspired by Greek mythology. Among the most celebrated works are those of Florentine painter Sandro Botticelli, whose *Birth of Venus* and *Primavera*, both of which were painted in the 1480s, were heavily inspired by Greek mythology. The *Birth of Venus* is Botticelli's interpretation of a classical motif known as the Venus Anadyomene, which depicts Aphrodite, goddess of love, rising fully formed from the sea, while *Primavera* is more complex and requires a deeper understanding of mythology and the theories of Plato to be understood. Botticelli's painting *Pallas and the Centaur* also dates from this period and is similarly complicated, with even the subject matter remaining unclear, although it's generally agreed to depict the goddess Minerva, patroness of learning and wisdom, subduing a minotaur, who represents wildness and sensuality.

Although Botticelli's near contemporary Raphael is better known for his religious paintings and portraits, his work being dictated by the demands of his patrons, he too managed to produce one major mythologically inspired piece – the fabulous *Galatea*, a fresco he painted in 1514 for the Villa Farnesina in Rome. Reminiscent of Botticelli's beautiful, supple-limbed, graceful goddesses, Raphael's work depicts the apotheosis of the nereid Galatea, the beloved of the cyclops Polyphemus who enraged him by falling in love with the handsome Acis. Although the tale was accepted to be a Greek myth, it's more likely that it was fabricated by Ovid while writing his *Metamorphoses*. The person of Galatea is so beautiful that it was rumoured that Raphael created her from a composite of all the most lovely women in Rome, creating a 'perfect' woman.

The great Leonardo da Vinci was also fascinated by Greek mythology, although sadly his best known classical piece, *Leda and the Swan,* has now been lost. The story of the beautiful Leda, who caught the eye of Zeus but resisted him until he magically transformed himself into a swan, was a very popular one during the Renaissance and beyond, with several different versions being created. Leonardo da Vinci originally planned to paint Leda seated with her babies, who have just hatched from their eggs, but then changed his mind and instead depicted her with the swan. Although the original, which was last recorded at the palace of Fontainebleau, has now disappeared, some of Leonardo's original sketches have survived and there are also several copies. Like his contemporary and rival Michelangelo, Leonardo was clearly heavily inspired not just by the ancient myths but also Hellenistic sculpture with its remarkable realism, vigour and floridity. Both artists were highly excited when the ancient sculpture *Laocöon and his Sons* was rediscovered

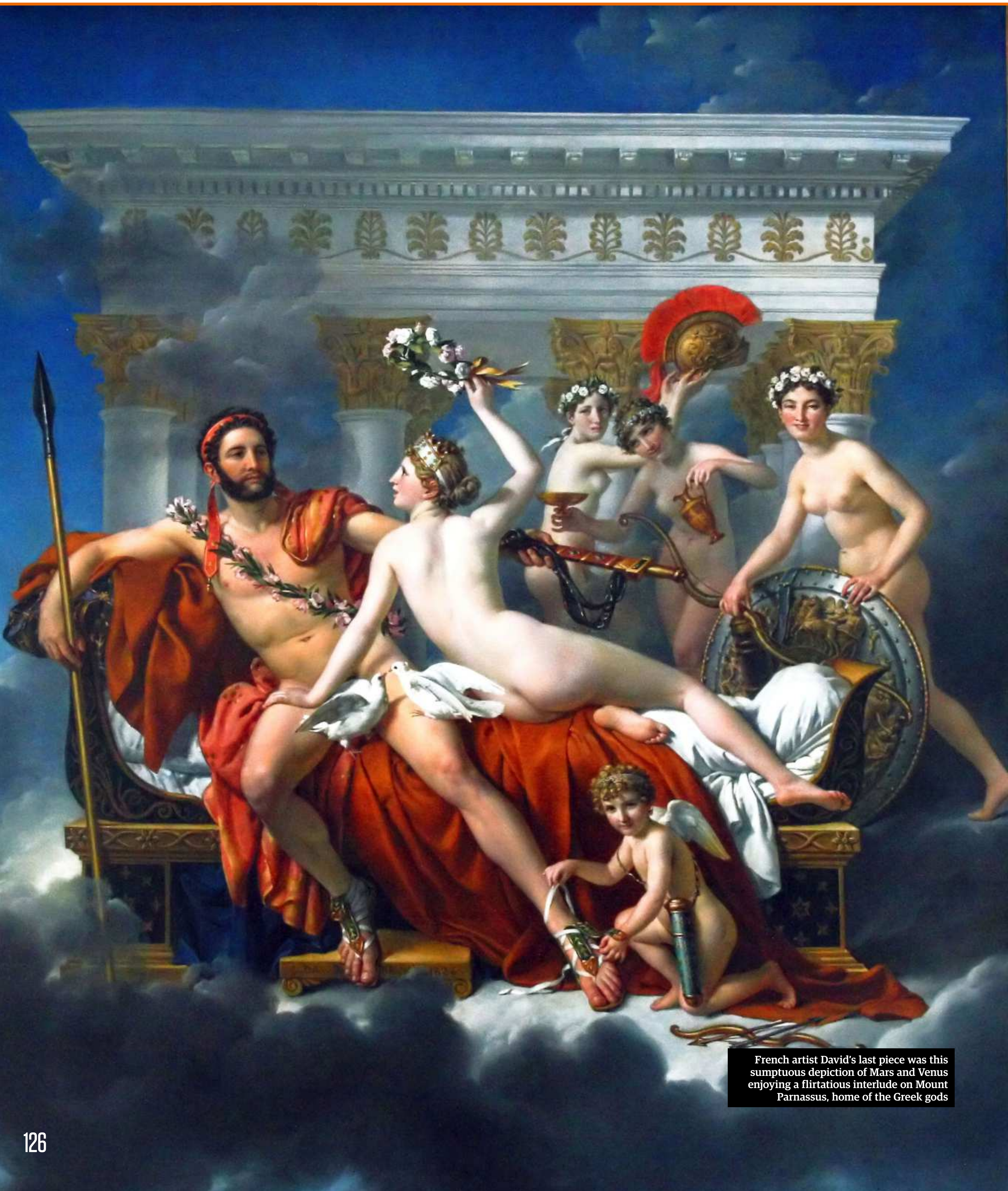
> "Renaissance Italians were drawn to these boisterous stories about Greek deities"

> Many believed that the study of classical Greek myths was essential to understanding Western literature

## The Venus de Milo

Now considered to be one of the most famous sculptures in the world, the entrancingly lovely Venus de Milo was considered lost to posterity until it was discovered by chance on the Greek island of Milos on 8 April 1820. Originally created between 130 and 100 BC by the Hellenistic sculptor Alexandros of Antioch, the piece resided in a small chapel on the island until eventually the site fell into ruins and the statue was forgotten until it was found by a pair of peasants looking for stone. Originally attributed to the famous sculptor Praxiteles of Attica, this was later disproved when an inscription naming Alexandros was found on the plinth. The statue has been on display in the Louvre ever since its discovery, except for brief evacuations during the Paris Commune uprising and WWII, and remains one of the most famous and popular pieces in the museum and continues to inspire artists with her serene beauty.

**Discovered by chance by two foraging peasants in the early 19th century, the *Venus de Milo* is now regarded as one of the most important and beautiful pieces of sculpture in the world**



French artist David's last piece was this sumptuous depiction of Mars and Venus enjoying a flirtatious interlude on Mount Parnassus, home of the Greek gods

> "Charles's French queen Henrietta Maria also had a taste for mythological illusions, often dressing up as a goddess in fanciful costumes designed by Inigo Jones"

in a Roman vineyard in 1506. The sculpture depicts the Trojan priest Laocoön and his two sons being killed by snakes sent by Poseidon, who was angered by Laocoön's unpriestly behaviour in his temple. The work is astonishingly powerful and fascinated artists, who immediately began to replicate the writhing limbs and anguished expressions of the statue. The rediscovery of the *Apollo Belvedere* in the middle of the 15th century also provoked great excitement as although the statue is a Roman copy of a Greek original, it was still considered to be the epitome of ancient Greek artistic skill and would in turn inspire such works as Michelangelo's *David*. The *Belvedere Torso*, a fragment of sculpture that probably originally depicted the hero Ajax who committed suicide at the end of the *Iliad*, triggered a similar reaction.

> Despite the decline in belief in Greek mythology, the tales have remained to be a source of allegory for creative minds

The Greek myths continued to strongly influence artists and writers from the Renaissance onwards, becoming part of the established artistic vernacular and as recognisable as the Christian themes that still predominated in art. Although depictions of Greek mythology in the north of Europe were rarely as florid as those in Italy and the south, they were still popular, particularly at the English and French courts, where the palaces were decorated with sumptuous murals, sculpture and paintings depicting scenes from ancient myths. In England, writers such as Shakespeare, Marlowe and Milton were all heavily influenced by mythology, using the works of Petrarch and Boccaccio as inspiration. Greek mythology would have a special place at the court of the Stuart kings, particularly that of Charles I whose great art collection was crammed with the mythological scenes that the king adored. Indeed, Charles's taste was clearly shared by his subjects, for when the works all went under the hammer after his execution, it was the classical paintings that tended to fetch the highest prices.

Charles's French queen Henrietta Maria also had a taste for mythological illusions, often dressing up as a goddess in fanciful costumes designed by Inigo Jones – a conceit that was taken even further by her nephew Louis XIV in France, who created a whole cult around himself based on the premise that he was the sun god Apollo reborn. As portraiture began to grow in popularity from the 16th century onwards, sitters became increasingly inclined to be depicted not as themselves but instead as gods, goddesses, nymphs and heroes, dressed in artfully arranged robes. In the 18th century it was highly fashionable for young ladies, including Marie Antoinette, to be painted as Hebe, daughter of Zeus and Hera, goddess of youth and cupbearer for the pantheon of gods on Olympus.

Meanwhile, the plays of Racine and operas of Handel, Gluck and Mozart brought new interpretations of the Greek myths to rapt audiences all over Europe. Gluck's beautiful *Iphigénie en Aulide*, based on the tragic story of Agammemnon and Clytemnestra's daughter Iphigenia, who was sacrificed before her father's fleet departed for Troy, caused a sensation when it premiered in Paris in April 1774. Gluck's patroness Marie Antoinette was responsible for the popularity of his work in France and her passion for the romance and drama of the Greek myths would go even further, influencing her fashion choices and the decor of her residences.

When the Romantic era followed in the wake of the French Revolution, Greek mythology continued to inspire artists, poets and writers, providing them with rich imagery and dramatic stories that would often be used as metaphors for the events of the day, such as Goya's disturbing *Saturn Devouring his Son*. This work, painted in the early 1820s depicts the Titan Cronus who, afraid that one of his children will eventually overthrow him and take his place, eats each one when they are newly born. It is a stark contrast to the French artist David's last great work, the rather preposterous *Mars Being Disarmed by Venus*, which was painted at around the same time and is a clear throwback to the romanticism and elegance of 18th century art with none of the grimness of Goya's painting.

This contrast between interpretations of Greek myth continued throughout the era with some artists being primarily inspired by the more bleak tales while others preferred to focus on the romantic and often bittersweet stories of young love. In England, the influential poets Keats, Byron and Shelley were deeply influenced by Greek mythology, particularly the works of Homer, which experienced a resurgance in popularity in the 19th century. Later on, the Pre-Raphaelite movement also plundered ancient stories for inspiration and were also clearly fascinated by the women of Troy, particularly Cassandra and Helen. By now the myths of ancient Greece had become such an integral part of culture that they were instantly recognisable, with most people being able to tell the different gods and goddesses apart, while almost everyone was familiar with the most popular stories, making them universally accessible.

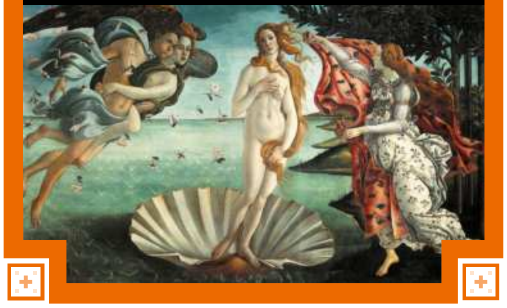
This popularity continued throughout the 20th century and into the present day, with artists and writers such as Jean Cocteau, Nathaniel Hawthorne, TS Eliot and James Joyce continuing to be inspired by the ancient tales. More recently Madeline Miller's *Circe*, a reinterpretation of the tale of Odysseus and the witch Circe – a daughter of the Titan Helios – has been a huge bestseller, while artworks depicting ancient Greek myths remain as popular as ever – proving that the Ancient Greeks were correct when they claimed that their gods were immortal and would live on in the hearts and minds of men forever.

## Sandro Botticelli

Alessandro di Mariano di Vanni Filipepi, better known to posterity as Sandro Botticelli, was born in Florence in around 1445, the son of a working-class tanner. The young Botticelli showed early promise and was apprenticed to the artist Fra Lippo Lippi when he was around 16 years old, remaining with him for the next six years.

Although Botticelli was clearly heavily influenced by Lippi, his essential style was entirely his own and would continue to develop throughout his career. While he produced some of the most beautiful Christian art works in existence, including frescoes in the Sistine Chapel, his most celebrated works remain his lovely *Birth of Venus* and the entrancing and mysterious *Primavera*, both of which were inspired by Greek mythology. Another significant work is his *Venus and Mars*, which was probably intended to decorate a wedding chamber and depicts the two deities languorously resting together in a meadow. Botticelli remained prolific throughout his long career, during which he enjoyed the patronage of the wealthy and influential Medici family, before dying in Florence in May 1510.

One of the most famous uses of Greek mythology is Botticelli's beautiful depiction of the goddess Aphrodite emerging fully formed from the sea



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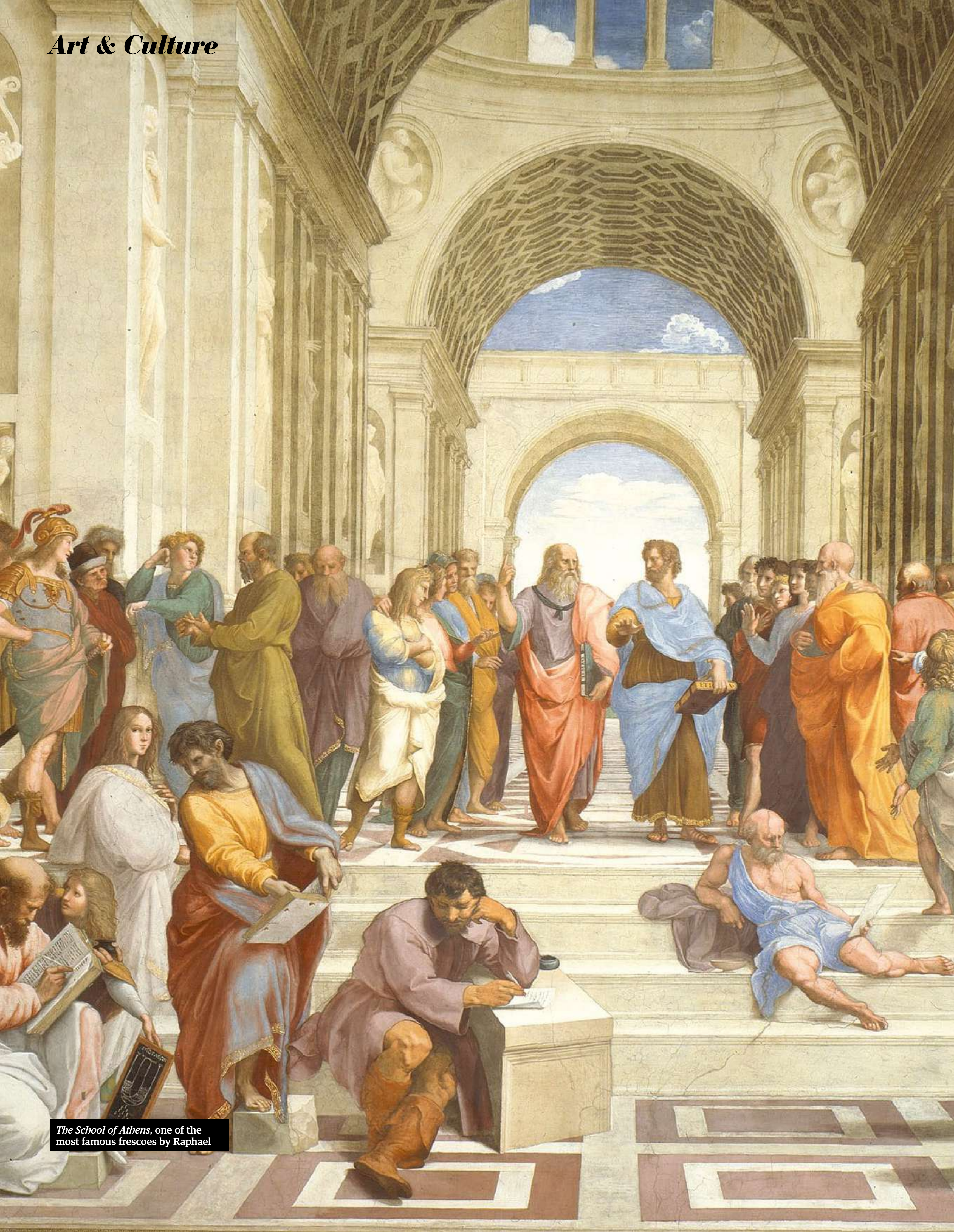


*The School of Athens*, one of the most famous frescoes by Raphael

# THE PHILOSOPHY OF ANCIENT GREECE

In the beginning there were myths. The earliest societies told themselves outlandish stories in order to make sense of the world. Then came the philosophers

Before the philosophers, people had worked under the assumption that human beings were the centre of all things. The Ancient Greeks had even imagined their gods as essentially people (albeit people with superpowers); always arguing and fighting among themselves, and indulging in interpersonal dramas like a sort of cosmic soap opera. With the arrival of philosophy, however, this began to change. Philosophers started to explore the idea that human beings were simply a part of a much larger system - and not necessarily its most important ingredient. They asked what our place was in the wider universe; what the world and its constituent parts were made of; and how it might have come into being. They decided that made-up stories were no longer sufficient as explanations for the basics of nature, and realised that dedicated study and reasoning were the only way to work towards finding the genuine answers.

The word 'philosophy' is derived from the Greek 'philo', meaning 'loving', and 'sophis', meaning 'wise'

Their work took them down a bewildering array of blind alleys and dead ends, but much of what they hit on was surprisingly accurate, paving the way for the generations of thinkers that followed them, and laying the basis of everything we now know, and are still learning about. They didn't always come up with the right answers, but they asked a lot of the right questions, often realising that the questions were more important than the answers anyway.

The pre-Socratic philosophers were those who lived before, or at least not later than, Socrates himself. They were the first philosophers to adopt new ways of studying the nature and order of the world (cosmology), and the possible origins of the world (cosmogony). The Milesian school is so named because its ideas stem from the philosophers of the town of Miletus. They pursued the idea that all things in life have their basis in one single substance - although they had rather different ideas about what exactly that substance might be. For Thales, the root of reality was water.

> "Socrates is widely credited with bringing philosophy into the mainstream conversation of the Athens of his time"

The Ephesian school went with Heraclitus's conclusion that the quintessential element was fire, or at least something like it. According to this theory, everything is always 'burning', each 'form' constantly reacting with its opposite, keeping the universe in a permanent state of flux.

The Eleatic school took its direction from Parmenides of Elea, whose attention focused on the act of thinking itself. He reasoned that there must be a disconnection between what actually, physically is and always has been, and our perception of that reality. Change is an illusion. Everything that exists must always have existed, because non-existence doesn't exist!

The Pluralist school grappled with that complicated notion, attempting to reconcile it with observable events like death and destruction. Empedocles agreed that non-existence was impossible, but argued that materials could be infinitely combined and recycled (this included the idea of reincarnation). Anaxagoras suggested that everything has indeed always existed, but as an infinite number of unimaginably small units. Anaxagoras's idea in turn informed the Atomist school, which taught that tiny atoms were the hidden ingredients of all objects, and possibly even of metaphysical concepts like the soul.

Pythagoras, who gave his name to Pythagoreanism, decided instead that numbers were the bedrock of reality, because everything can be counted. From his discovery that the strings of a harp make harmonies with each other according to ratios of their length, he extrapolated that the stars had a similar relationship between numbers and harmony, making "the music of the spheres" as they moved in the sky.

But it wasn't all cosmological. The Sophists were more concerned with human beings than with esoteric arguments about the basis of reality: "Man is the measure of all things," as Protagoras put it. There were no one-size-fits-all rules for human behaviour. People should act socially and politically as individuals in the way that most benefitted themselves and their fellows.

All of the above were fundamental steps towards the classical philosophy of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Socrates is widely credited with bringing philosophy into the mainstream conversation of the Athens of his time. Plato followed in his footsteps, and was responsible for disseminating many of Socrates' supposed ideas (we only have Plato's word that his quoting of Socrates is accurate), while igniting debates of his own in the form of his famous dialogues. And Aristotle was a student at Plato's Academy, who broke away from his teacher and gave the greatest weight yet to deriving knowledge from empirical observations rather than high-minded theorising.

What followed was the era of Hellenistic philosophy, which lasted until the beginnings of the Roman Empire in the early 30s BCE. The word 'Hellenistic' itself is derived from 'Hellas', meaning Greece. Like the Sophists, they were often more

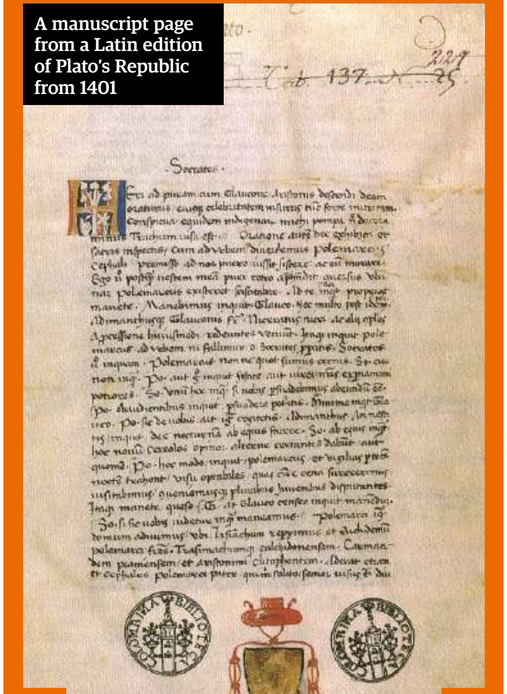
## Plato's Republic

Perhaps the most famous of all of Plato's works, the *Republic* outlines his notion of the perfect government. Presented as a series of dialogues between Socrates and various others, it explores the meaning of justice, and discusses a number of existing city-states, before suggesting some hypothetical ones in their place.

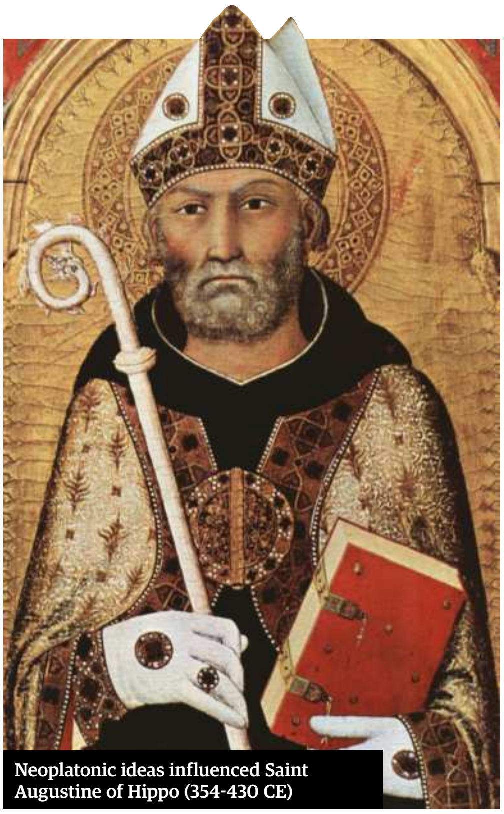
For Plato, government is necessary because people aren't all perfect, and some are fundamentally better than others. He divides people into two types: those who are weak-willed and give in to their selfish desires ('akrasia'), versus those who have the integrity and strength of character to adhere to Plato's ideal of goodness ('arête'). He also suggests a social structure of three tiers: the rulers, the soldiers and the tradespeople.

Unsurprisingly, the philosophers are at the top, thanks to their abundance of arête, and their understanding of ideas and forms. Soldiers are similarly virtuous, but are fonder of action rather than deep thought. And tradespeople are the everyday dogsbodies who want to own things and sleep with people.

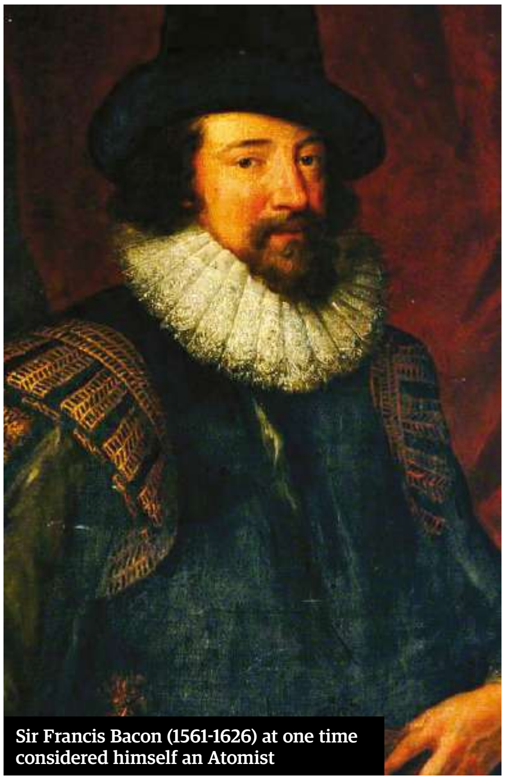
Plato named his ideal city Kallipolis, and believed it represented a new third way between democracy and tyranny, both of which rewarded selfishness. Philosophers, he was sure, would rule for the many and not the few.



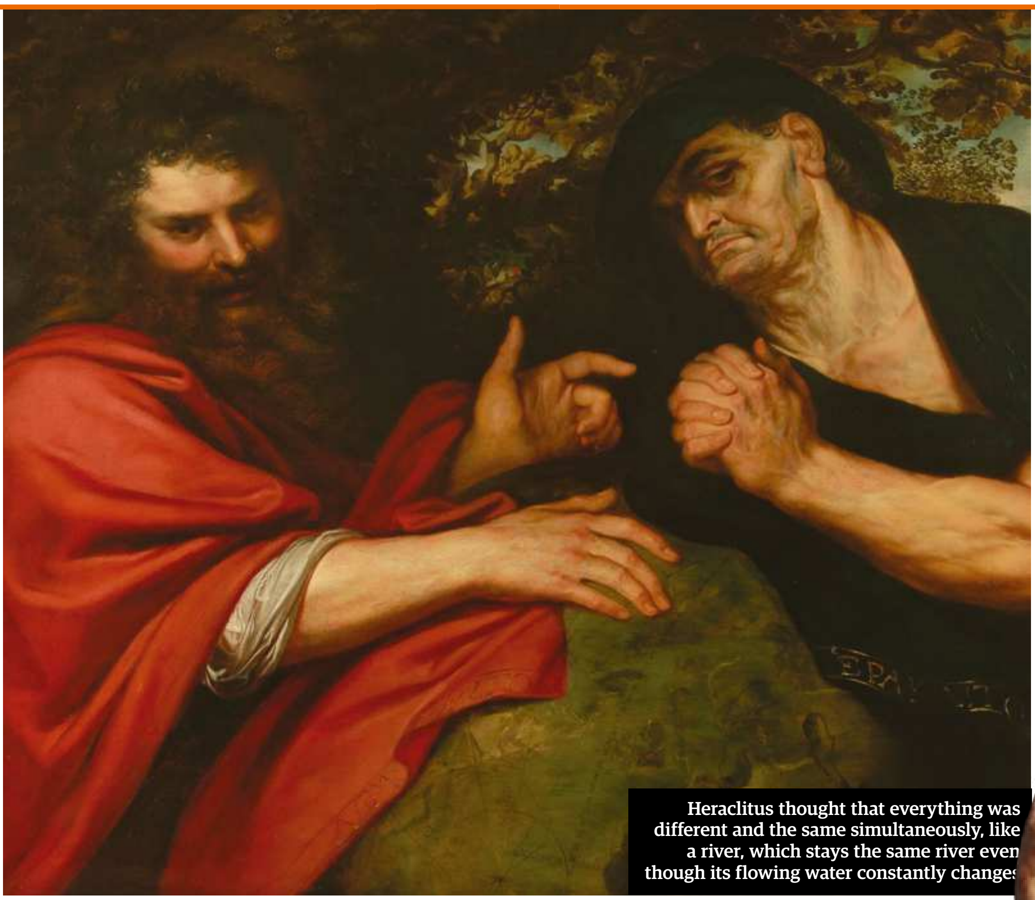
A manuscript page from a Latin edition of Plato's Republic from 1401



Neoplatonic ideas influenced Saint Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE)



Sir Francis Bacon (1561-1626) at one time considered himself an Atomist



Heraclitus thought that everything was different and the same simultaneously, like a river, which stays the same river even though its flowing water constantly changes

concerned with day-to-day life than the substance of the universe. Among the many and varied Hellenistic schools of thought, these were some of the most significant.

Stoicism, as popularised by Zeno of Citium in the 3rd century BCE, involves limiting one's desires and accepting what life throws at you. The Stoics believed that emotional reactions result in errors of judgement, and are pointless because natural events cannot be controlled.

Skepticism, in the version espoused by Pyrrho of Elis, is about suspension of judgement. We can't trust our senses, and we can never be certain of the truth of anything. We can only have ideas - and ideas can always be argued with. This is an offshoot of Sophism, a tenet of which is that people are often mistaken. What you think is true may not be true at all.

> Anaximander thought the underpinning of the universe was a made-up substance, 'apeiron', the basis of earth, air, fire and water

Adherents to the idea of Cynicism - such as Diogenes and Antisthenes - rejected social and material conventions as having no value. They believed that mental clarity could only be achieved by throwing off the trappings of society. Diogenes said that "bad people obey their lusts as servants obey their masters."

Epicureanism (named after its progenitor, Epicurus) has become associated with seeking pleasure, but was actually about avoiding pain, which isn't necessarily the same thing. Somewhat akin to Stoicism, the Epicureans believed that facing life with the correct attitude was important for achieving intellectual peace. Superstitious beliefs were to be avoided as the causes of unnecessary worry; if there are gods, Epicurus taught, they don't care what we do.

Eclecticism began to suggest that several different systems of philosophy only deviated from one another on minor points, and tried to find the commonalities rather than insist on the differences. Antiochus of Ascalon was one of its earliest proponents. He highlighted the contradictions in the arguments of the Skeptics, pointing out that you can't assert that nothing can be asserted, or prove that nothing can be proved. There may be worth in many schools of thought.

And finally there was Neoplatonism. This is more a historical term than an exact philosophical school, and the word was not actually coined until the 19th century CE. It's generally traced back to the Egyptian philosopher Plotinus, whose original intention seems to have been to preserve and continue the teachings of Plato and Aristotle. Gradually, elements of Persian and Indian philosophy were mixed in, and it became a religious philosophy based around the idea of 'the One' being from which the rest of the universe emanates.

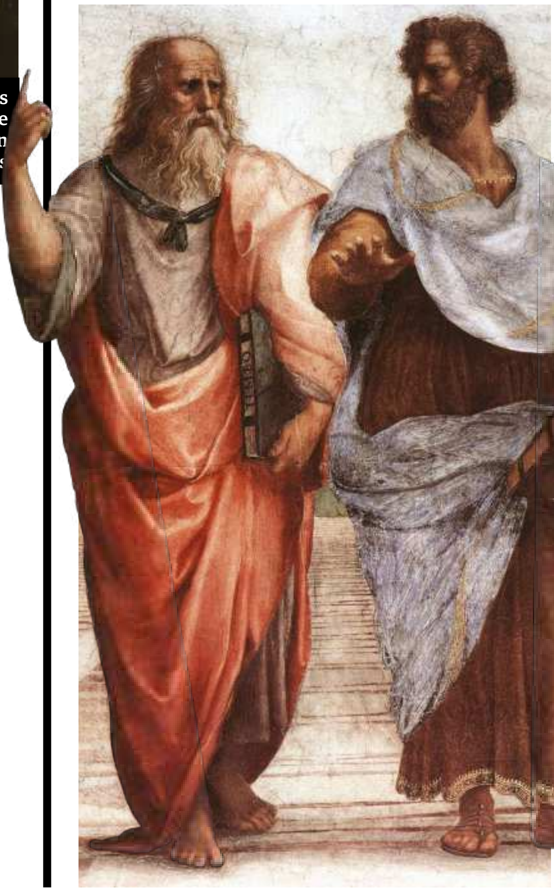
Afterwards, from the early days of the Roman Empire and all through the Middle Ages and beyond, the idea of a single God began to take hold, drastically affecting the direction that philosophy took. It was now competing with religion, and thinkers turned their attentions to reconciling reason with faith.

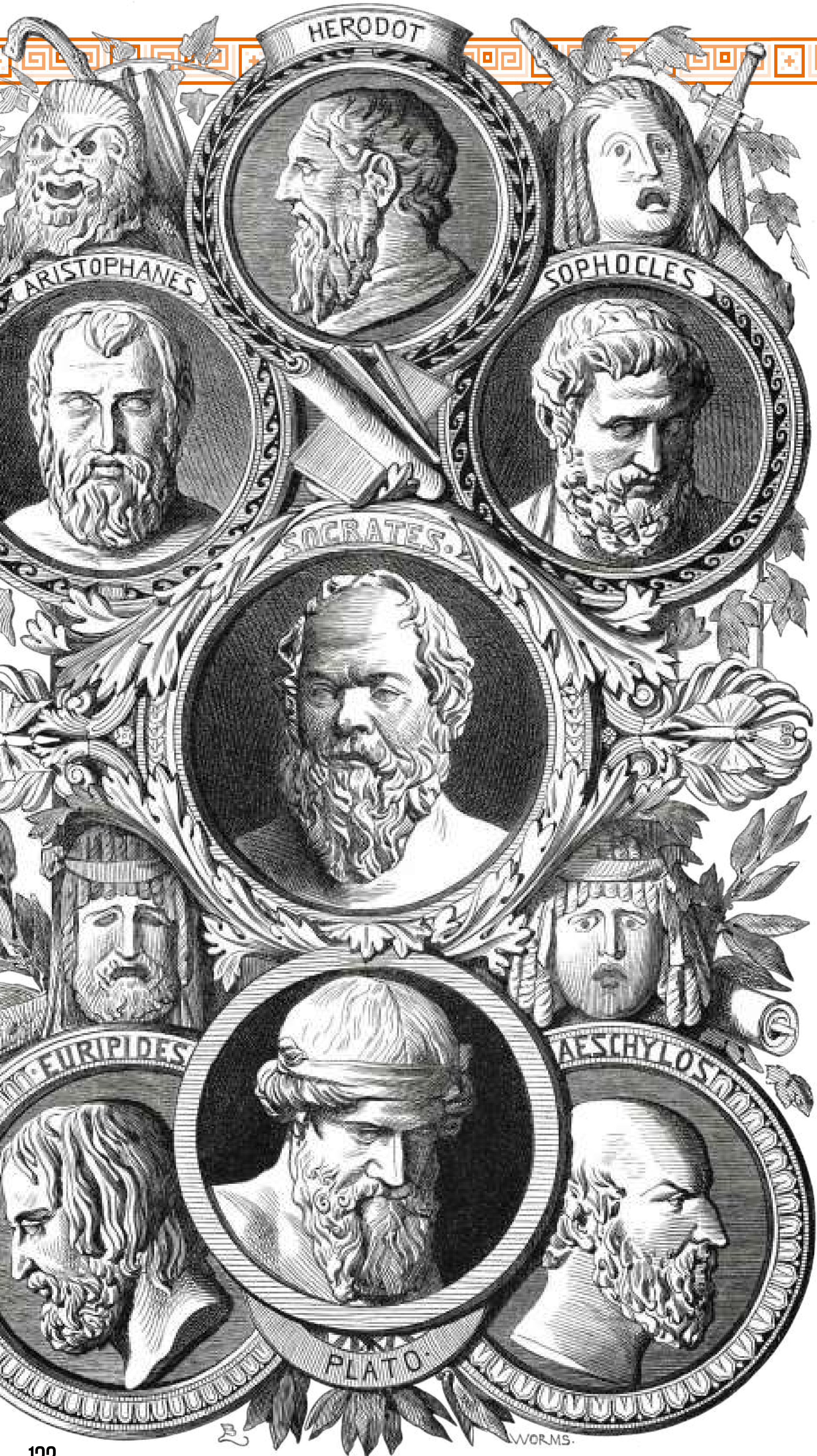
## Platonic idealism

For Plato, ideas were real – the 'forms' that give shape to the world around us. These forms were the perfect examples of things that exist in the world, with the versions we encounter on an everyday basis merely imperfect copies. You might have in your head, for example, a perfect image of a magnificent oak tree. That is the form, whereas the scraggly oaks in your local park are the reality. Another example might be a row of biscuits in a bakery. The biscuits themselves are the reality, but the biscuit cutter they came from is the form.

Plato believed that everyone is born with an innate understanding of the world of forms, but it gets obscured as we grow older. The fact that we can figure out these forms through logical deduction was, according to Plato, 'remembering' things we have never experienced, and therefore proof of an immortal soul.

The task of the philosopher then, is to progress towards the world of forms, rather than that of imperfect reality; to identify ideas, and bring one's life and thoughts into accordance with them. It's a big ask, since perfection is hard to achieve. But the destination is less important than the journey.





Neoplatonism was a good fit for this new era. Its idea that evil stems from human sin and simply the absence of good was an early influence in the work of the early Christian theologian Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE). It proved significant for the Italian theologian Saint Bonaventure almost a thousand years later, and on the subsequent Italian Renaissance. Neoplatonism provided a bridge between philosophy and religion for centuries.

But Atomism also saw an explosion of revived interest in the 16th and 17th centuries, informing the pioneering scientific work of Nicolaus Copernicus and Galileo Galilei, and the philosophical investigations of Sir Francis Bacon and Thomas Hobbes. In fact, while some are now obscure, practically all of the Ancient Greek philosophies retain some interest and relevance to this day, as the very fact that we're still talking about them suggests. They may be ancient, but many centuries on, they can still teach us new ways of thinking.

However, ancient Greek philosophy wasn't as straightforward as having the separate schools. There were also the skeptics, who were as much concerned with belief as they were with actual knowledge. According to them, as long as knowledge had not been attained, they could not actually affirm anything. In fact, one early Greek thinker by the name of Xenophanes somewhat famously came up with the idea that even if someone succeeded in saying something that was actually true, he would not know this and thus everything is just belief.

Coming from the Greek word 'skepsis' meaning 'investigation', the skeptic philosophers saw themselves as investigators and their way of life was devoted to enquiry. Their core concepts were belief, the suspension of judgment, what makes up the truth, appearances and, as said before, investigation. Their goal was to find the distinctions between reality and appearances, knowledge and belief, and the non-evident and the evident.

Plato's Academy turned to skepticism under the leadership of Arcesilaus in 266 BCE, although the man didn't refer to himself as a skeptic. He highlighted Socrates' want to investigate everything in a bid to explore people's beliefs - the birth of academic skepticism.

The academic skeptics were born out of Plato's writing, in a way. Inspired by the Socrates that appears in Plato's dialogues, it was a skeptic's aim to battle against the dogmatists - and so they found themselves going up against the Stoics more often that not in a bid to overcome their influential confident attitudes.

Their way of debate was also somewhat different to others of the time. Instead of asserting a position, the Academics would claim that their beliefs were mutually inconsistent and so they were not able to justify their claim to knowledge. The whole underlying message of their doctrine was that knowledge was possible.

Academic skepticism didn't die out with the Greeks, however. Famed Roman orator Cicero, alive in the 1st century BCE, began following the tradition as a young man and it was an idea that made sense. Later Academic skepticism saw both sides of an argument being put forward so that the rational idea would prevail and given his penchant for the rhetoric, Cicero no doubt found this useful when it was translated across to public speaking.

Another school of skepticism was Pyrrhonian skepticism, founded by Pyrrho of Elis, which liked to pose difficult interpretive questions. In fact, Pyrrho is often regarded as the founder of ancient skepticism. It was he who saw those who suspend judgment as wise men and he put across the idea of a neutral position - accepting things as they are without thinking of it any further. So influential were Pyrrho's ideas, that he was still influencing philosophical thinking into the 17th-century.

Few early Greek thinkers that we know of had skeptical or proto-skeptical inclinations with the exception of Democritus and, as we have seen above, Xenophanes. It was Xenophanes who came up with the idea that all conceptions of gods are anthropomorphic and culturally contingent - the Greeks worship Greek gods, the Ethiopians worship Ethiopian gods, and if horses had hands, surely they would draw gods that look something like themselves, too.

Xenophanes wasn't the only one thinking about the gods. Euhemerus was a friend of King Cassander of Macedon, who wrote *Hiera Anagraphe*, or the *Sacred Inscription*, in the early 3rd century BCE. The work combined fiction, political utopianism and theology as he wrote of an imaginary voyage to the Indian Ocean where he finds an island called Panchaea. There, he wonders at the marvels and the clear three-class structure of priests and craftsmen, farmers, and soldiers and shepherds before he stumbles upon a temple dedicated to Zeus.

Inside of it, he finds the holy inscription that gives the story its name. It claims that Zeus, the other gods and their ancestors were mortals who were worshipped because of their accomplishments, and that's the ideology that Euhemerus wanted to put forward. Gods weren't worshipped because they were simply gods - he saw myth and legend as history in disguise, and the idea, Euhemerism, was named after him. His beliefs saw him be considered an atheist.

There were others who were mixing mythology and history. Later on, in the 1st century BCE, there was Diodorus Siculus, who was a writer of Greek history born in Sicily. His aim was to use Latin and Greek sources to write a history of Greece from the mythical era all the way down to Julius Caesar's first consulship. He wrote of the Trojan War, Alexander the Great and what was for him almost the present day. But while he wrote Greece's mythological beginnings down as history, he was one of the main supporters of the idea that Plato and the other Greek thinkers had learned their wisdom from the Egyptians.

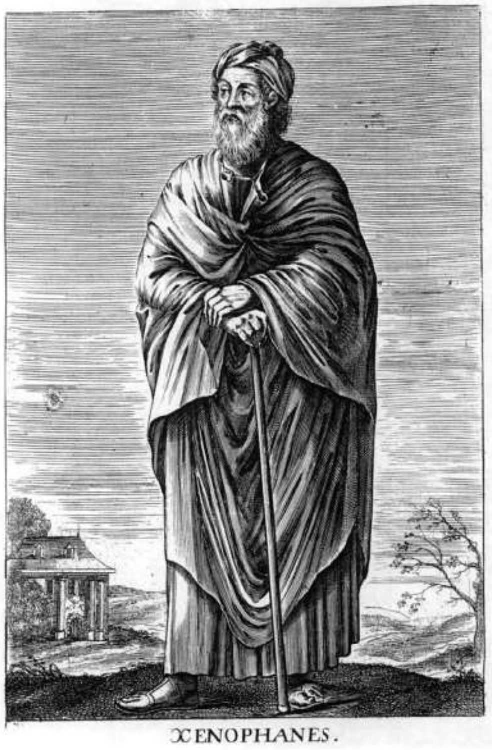
There were, of course, later Roman philosophers, too. One prominent one in the later Roman Empire was Lactantius, who became an advisor to the emperor Constantine. All that really survives of Lactantius' writings are his treatises on God and Christianity, both of which he was a strong supporter of. In fact, because of these writings he was given the name 'Christian Cicero' by Renaissance humanists later in history. The ancient world also gave way to hermeneutics, although this name did not actually exist until the 17th century. While the name comes from a Greek word that Plato used when he was talking about poets, it wasn't attributed to a philosophical school as such until the Enlightenment era. It was, and is, the idea of interpreting texts. There were three different hermeneutic perspectives in ancient Greece - allegorical, religious and logical. While the allegorical and religious strands deal primarily with the Bible, it is the logical strand that was perhaps most employed by the ancient Greeks during their time. It was with the Stoics that post-Medieval philosophers have found the most examples of hermeneutics in the Greek world, specifically the work of both Aristotle and Plato. Aristotle's *Poetics*, *Rhetoric* and *On Sophistical Refutations* along with Plato's *Cratylus*, *Ion* and *The Republic* among others questioned the presentation of arguments, speeches and poems, thus putting them into the class of hermeneutics, although they didn't necessarily deal with the understanding of texts and knowledge. This is perhaps most apparently in *Plato's Socrates*, which seems to demonstrate the concern for having a democratic society.

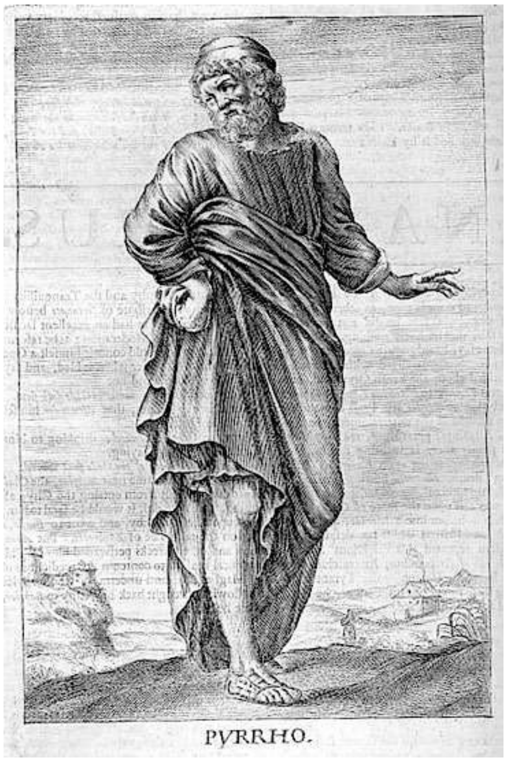
> In its modern usage, 'sophism' (or 'sophistry') has come to mean a confusing or illogical argument, or an argument for its own sake

This idea of social justice is also apparent in the same way in Destruktion, which, according to one modern scholar, examines the origin and validity of the ancient Greek understanding of consciousness. And to return to Aristotle for a brief moment, it can be argued that although it was perhaps a 17th-century thinker who first studied hermeneutics properly, it was Plato's most famous student who wrote the first extant treatise on the subject where he discussed how spoken and written words were the expressions of a person's inner thoughts.

All in all, hermeneutic thinkers were and are of the thought that understanding is the interpretive act of integrating small things into a meaningful whole - putting things into a larger context like our lives makes everything make more sense.

Each different branch of ancient Greek philosophy is as important to us now as it was to the contemporary philosophers of that era. Thanks to events in between like the Renaissance that spread across Europe and the Enlightenment, which eventually saw ramifications in the wider world, the Greek schools and theories have reached wider audiences, meaning that even more people have been able to interact with them and debate with one another what they perceive to be the truth.





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# MODERN PERSPECTIVES ON GREEK MYTHOLOGY

A surge of interest in classical Greek literature and language engendered reevaluation of mythology, its origins and influence

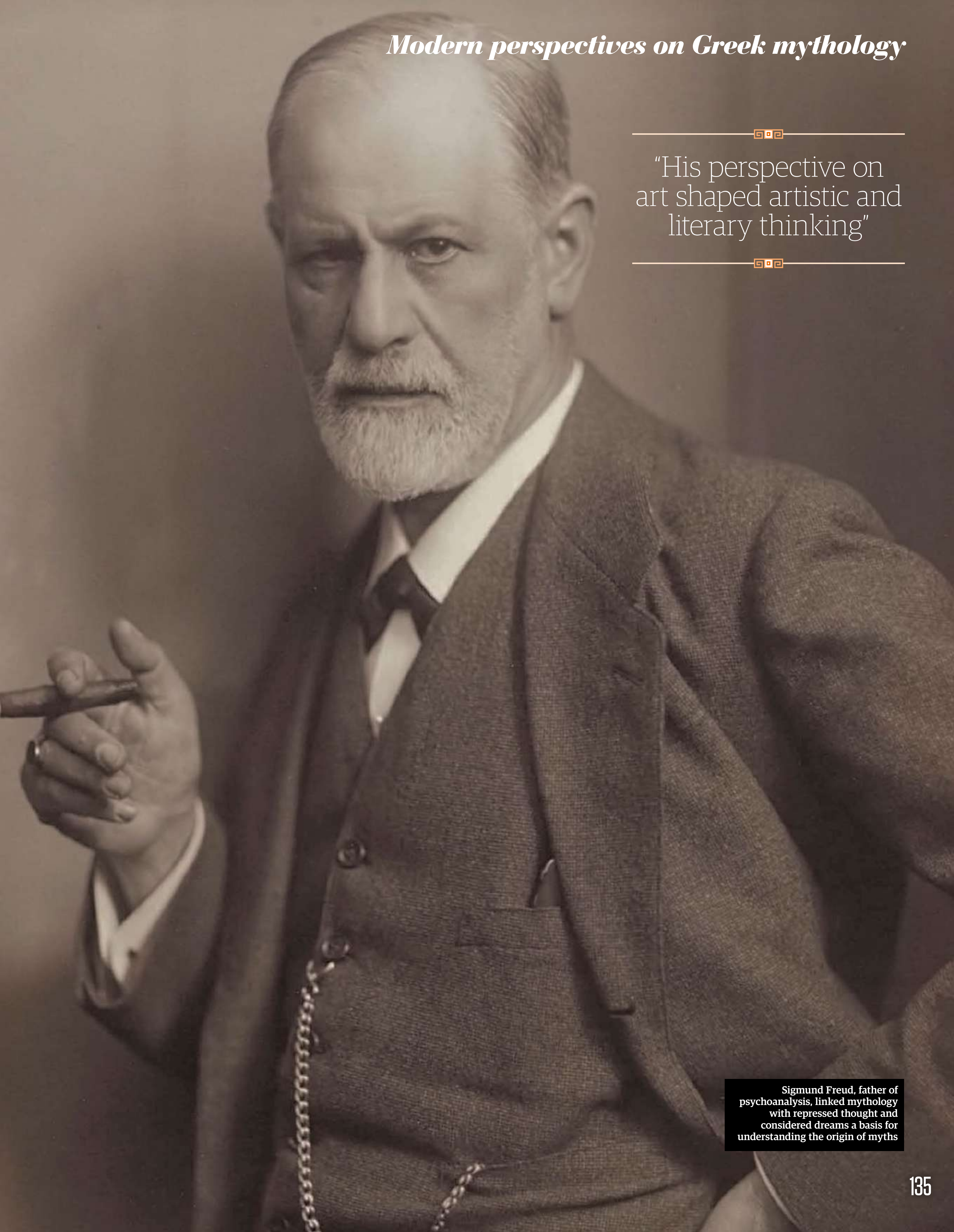
A supremely ironic re-emergence of the study and interpretation of Greek mythology began amid the flourishing intellectual tide of the Age of Enlightenment. Despite the fact that Western civilisation was undeniably rooted in the ancient Greek culture and influenced by its tales of creation, heroic struggle, and the interaction between humans, demigods, and gods, the Judeo-Christian cultural consciousness had either ignored or effectively shunted aside any deeper discovery of its origins and any cross-cultural ties that might exist among other civilisations of the Mediterranean and the East.

> Sigmund Freud used many of the Greek myths to explain his theories of psychosexual development

By the mid-18th century, German scholars had begun to reinvigorate the study of the classics in university settings. Johann Matthias Gesner, professor of poetry and eloquence at the University of Göttingen, introduced the study of Greek mythology and culture, while his successor, Christian Gottlob Heyne, brought a scientific approach to Greek studies, including extensive translations and writings on the topic as well as archaeology and philology, the study of languages in oral and written forms in order to establish their history, origins, and earliest meanings. Through Heyne, the modern study of Greek mythology was shaped, and its impact on European culture, particularly in Germany, furthered future mythological research.

Johann Joachim Winckelmann was an early Greek scholar who devoted much of his energy to the development of criticism and exploration of classical art. Winckelmann was the first to differentiate ancient Western art between Greek, Greco-Roman, and Roman styles along with corresponding time periods. He is also remembered as the "prophet and founding hero of modern archaeology," according to American author and historian Daniel Boorstin. In 1755, Winckelmann's landmark *Thoughts on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture* raised interest in Greek mythology throughout mainland Europe.

A decade later, the publication of *The History of Art in Antiquity* intertwined the history of Greek art with the long history of Greece itself. His perspective on art, primarily that its ultimate goal is to achieve beauty, shaped artistic and literary thinking, encouraging others to explore the origins of Greek mythology, which inspired the ancient art so many Europeans idealised during the Enlightenment.



“His perspective on art shaped artistic and literary thinking”

Sigmund Freud, father of psychoanalysis, linked mythology with repressed thought and considered dreams a basis for understanding the origin of myths

## EMERGENCE OF COMPARATIVE APPROACHES

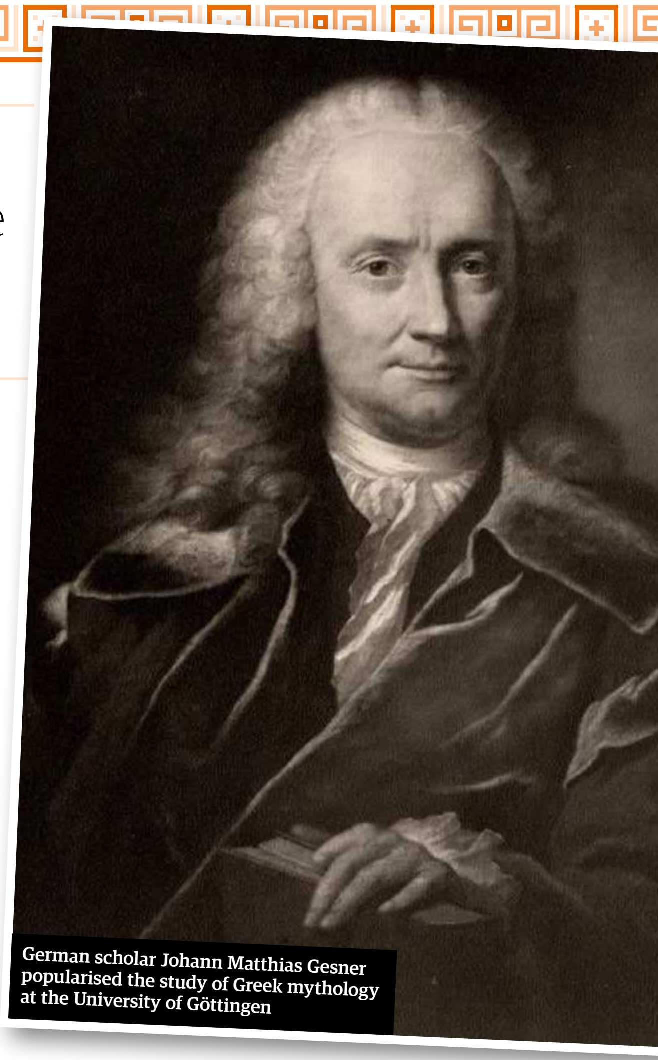
The application of comparative philology to the study of Greek mythology brought parallels and archetypal themes to light. Common elements in languages of Greek and other Indo-European civilisations led to conclusions based on human experiences that seemed to transcend simple geographic barriers or isolation.

A German-born philologist and scholar of Eastern studies, Max Müller lived most of his life in Britain. The discovery of the Indo-European family of languages and his translations of Sanskrit texts, including those in the possession of the East India Company, led to conclusions that languages and human belief systems were linked to one another. Müller saw the sacred Indian Vedic texts written in Sanskrit, particularly the *Rig-Veda*, as keys to understanding the development of early pagan religion in Europe.

Müller believed the gods of the *Rig-Veda* were responses to the elements of nature - Sun, Moon, wind, rain, and naturally occurring phenomena - in short, a form of nature worship. Logically, these gods, and the pantheon of Greek gods that developed, were the personifications of the forces of nature imbued with supernatural powers. He called mythology a "disease of language" that transformed ideas and experiences into beings. The common thread in these myths lay embedded in the shared attributes of the languages.

> "Every society passes through three distinct stages of development"

Thus, using comparative mythology Müller found that common themes in myths were related to the development of varied religions and cultures. Further, such conclusions offered insights into the human psyche - that is, into how the human mind responds to external phenomena in an attempt possibly to rationalise the world around us, as well as the existence of some psychological conditions.



**German scholar Johann Matthias Gesner popularised the study of Greek mythology at the University of Göttingen**

## FROM MYTH TO REALITY

In 1871, English cultural anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor published the two-volume *Primitive Culture*, the foundation of cultural anthropology. Tylor believed that every society passes through three distinct stages of development: savagery, barbarism, and civilisation. He reintroduced the term 'animism', the belief that all things possess a soul or spiritual essence, into the popular lexicon. He found relevance in the study of cultural development through the millennia in its possible application for the improvement of British society. He asserted that laws of human thought and action have existed since the earliest civilisations, resulting in uniform action due to uniform causes.

Influenced by the work of Tylor, Adolf Bastian, and others, American Joseph Campbell, a professor at Sarah Lawrence College in New York, explored the journey of the archetypal hero, which is commonly found throughout mythology. His book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, was published in 1949. Campbell stressed the common pattern of events that exists across cultures and through the passage of time, evidence of an overriding psychic unity of mankind. Polish anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski emphasised the fact that mythology helps to provide satisfaction of basic human cultural needs. A common belief system, therefore, is essential to cultural identity and cohesion.

The theory of structuralism asserts that elements of a culture are understood in the context of a larger system of being and interaction. It attempts to reveal the framework that guides all things that human beings feel or relate to, actions that they may take, and perceptions of the world that they harbour in their individual psyches and collective associations. French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss was among those who explored the underlying patterns that result from these structural elements. Levi-Strauss advocated the concept that the 'savage' mind and the 'civilised' mind share the same human characteristics. Published in 1962, his book *The Savage Mind* expands discussions surrounding early, primitive thought to encompass the forms of thought that are common to all human beings, regardless of their external environment.

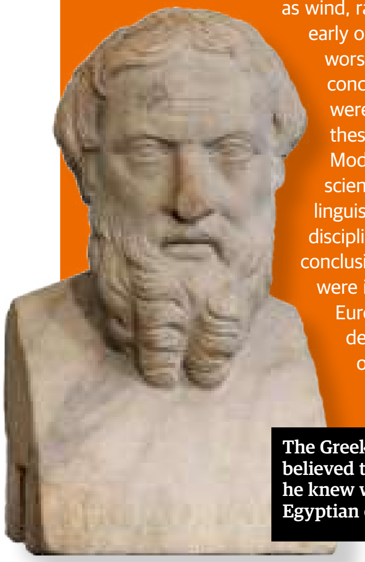
In 1971, Levi-Strauss published *Mythologiques*, a four-volume work that traces the origin and

> Georg Nikolaus Köhler presented Gesner with his first Greek texts, which sparked his curiousity in the period

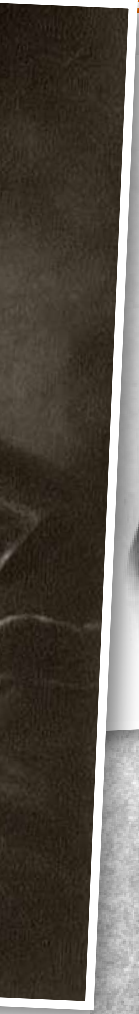
## Origins of Greek mythology

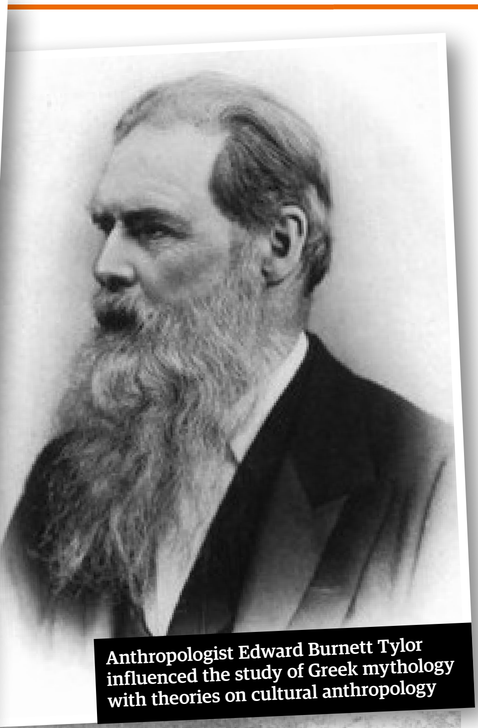
The origin of Greek mythology is shrouded in theory and conjecture. The Greek historian Herodotus believed that the pantheon of Gods worshipped in ancient Greece had been appropriated from the Egyptian civilisation, particularly when considering the numerous gods with similar powers and their comparable stories. Early Christian scholars often attributed Greek mythology to a corruption of Biblical texts, identifying the heroes of these stories by other names. For example, the parallels between Samson and Heracles are obvious as both are men of great strength, both are betrayed by women, and both engage in mortal combat with a lion.

Allegorical interpretation suggests that all mythological characters are symbolic, while the historical theory asserts that all the "gods" were actual people who once existed and that their supernatural exploits were embellishments that were added through the years. The physical theory relates that natural elements such as wind, rain, and fire were early objects of religious worship with the conclusion that the gods were personifications of these phenomena. Modern archaeology and scientific study of linguistics and other disciplines have brought conclusions that the ancient were influenced by other European civilisations development of their of gods.



**The Greek historian Herodotus believed the pantheon of gods he knew was borrowed from Egyptian culture**





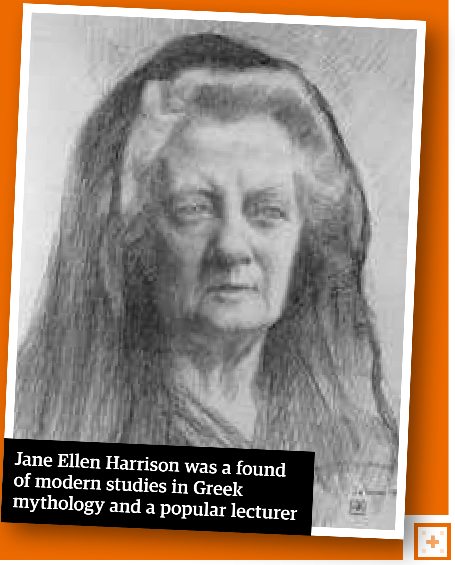
Anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor influenced the study of Greek mythology with theories on cultural anthropology

German philologist Max Müller was renowned for his knowledge of Sanskrit and familiarity with comparative mythology

## Jane Ellen Harrison's contribution

Jane Ellen Harrison, one of the founders of modern studies in ancient Greek religion and mythology, was one of the most prominent women in her field during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. A native of Yorkshire, she spent 17 years studying Greek archaeology and art at the British Museum from 1880 to 1897 and then lectured extensively, becoming quite popular as 1,600 people attended one event on the topic of Athenian gravestones. She travelled to Greece and took part in archaeological excavations. In 1882, she published the book *The Odyssey in Art and Literature*, which described the common deep mythological themes both in Homer's epic poem and in the images painted by ancient Greek vase artists.

Harrison's 1903 book *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* described the relationship between myth and ritual, particularly in the context of numerous festivals held in ancient Athens. She applied emerging knowledge of anthropology and social sciences to her study of ancient Greece along with colleagues Gilbert Murray and Francis Cornfield. The academic trio became known as the Cambridge Ritualists. Harrison was also a suffragist. She died in 1928 at the age of 77.



Jane Ellen Harrison was a found of modern studies in Greek mythology and a popular lecturer

evolution of a single myth that originated at the tip of the South American continent to Central America, and eventually to the Arctic, establishing the existence of such a phenomenon over time. By implication the same pattern may well hold true with Greek mythology and origins arising from earlier Indo-European cultures.

## MYTH AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, linked the function of the human mind to the cultural aspect of understanding the symbolism of mythology. He considered myths to be the manifestation of underlying, repressed thoughts, desires, or ideas. He offered that the interpretation of dreams was the basis for understanding the origin of a myth within the context of an individual's relationships, which are influencing elements on that interpretation.

Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung, who also influenced Campbell, described a "collective consciousness" and the archetypal elements that it engenders. For Jung, mythology was more about the human mind than either the physical world or the existence of a god or gods. Therefore, he reasoned, it is to be read and understood through symbolism.

## CHRISTIAN REINTERPRETATIONS

The Christian faithful of the 18th and 19th centuries saw the myths of the ancient Greeks as rooted in fable or fiction, and the use of the word 'myth' itself was steeped in that connotation. In a broader sense, the human experience and expression of a myth may be more clearly understood as containing religious truth brought to the people in their own language. For 500 years, many Christian theologians had argued against mythology, seeing it as outdated and detrimental to the Christian teachings.

However, by the 20th century, others have begun to see mythology in a somewhat different light. Rather than detracting from the human experience, they reason that mythology is the foundation of religion and an essential component of it.

Author J R R Tolkien, a devout Catholic who penned *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, called mythology a "divine echo of the truth" and an act of "subcreation" within the primary creation of God. Tolkien urged his friend, author C S Lewis, to return to the Christian church, and Lewis later became famous for numerous works, including *The Chronicles of Narnia*, a series of seven children's fantasy novels, which incorporates Christian themes but also includes characters from Greek and Roman mythology and fairy tales popularised in the British Isles.

Lewis called the story of Christ a "true myth," and explained that it is "a myth working on us in the same way as the others, but with this tremendous difference that it really happened: and one must be content to accept it in the same way, remembering that it is God's myth where the others are men's myths: ie, the pagan stories are God expressing Himself through the minds of poets, using such images as He found there, while Christianity is God expressing Himself through what we call real things."

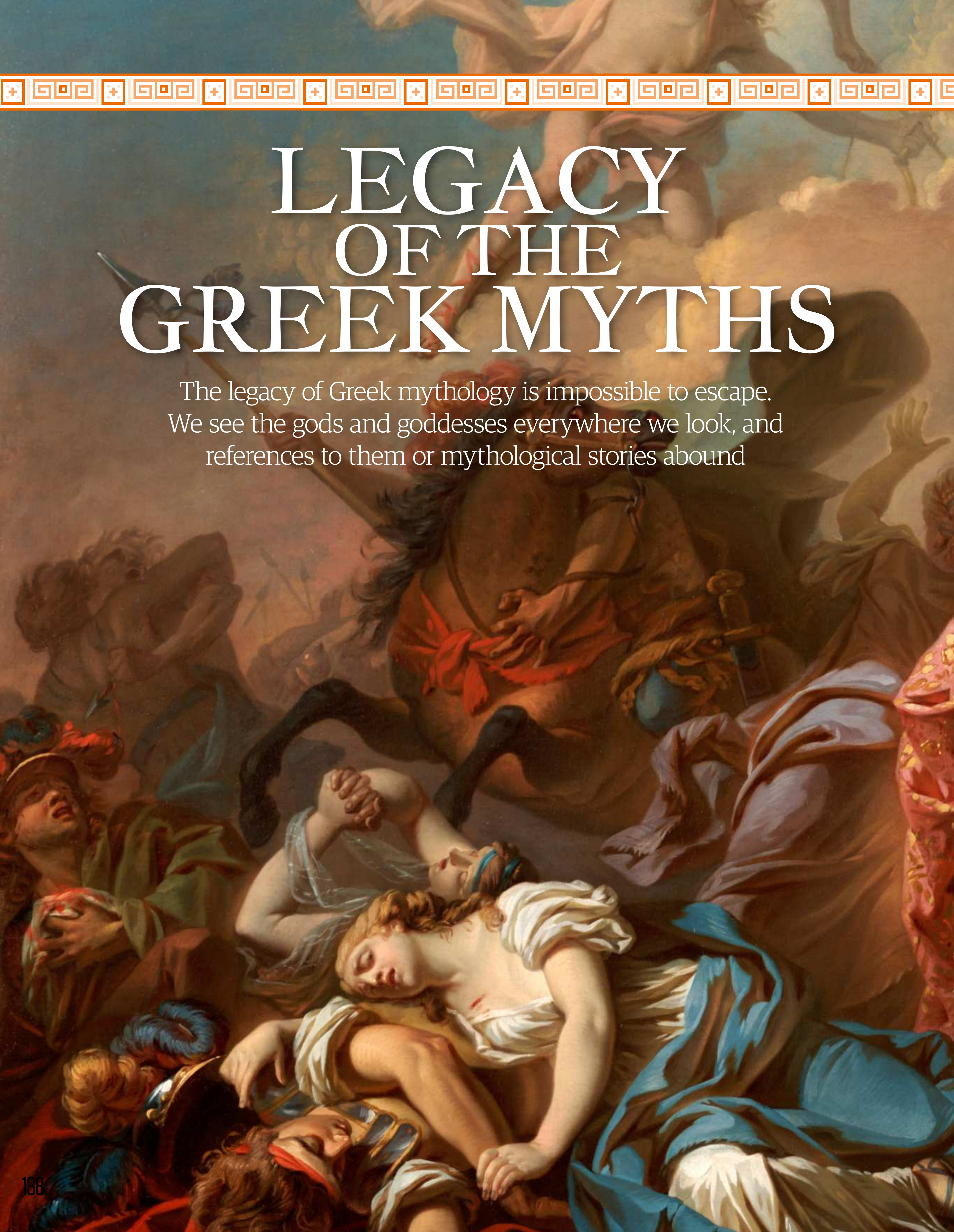
Christianity maintains connections to ancient Greek religion and other religions of the world through certain shared 'mythology'. Modern Christian observers espouse varied viewpoints from the consistent literal interpretation of Biblical texts to the acknowledgment that elements of the scripture incorporate allegorical or "mythical" aspects.

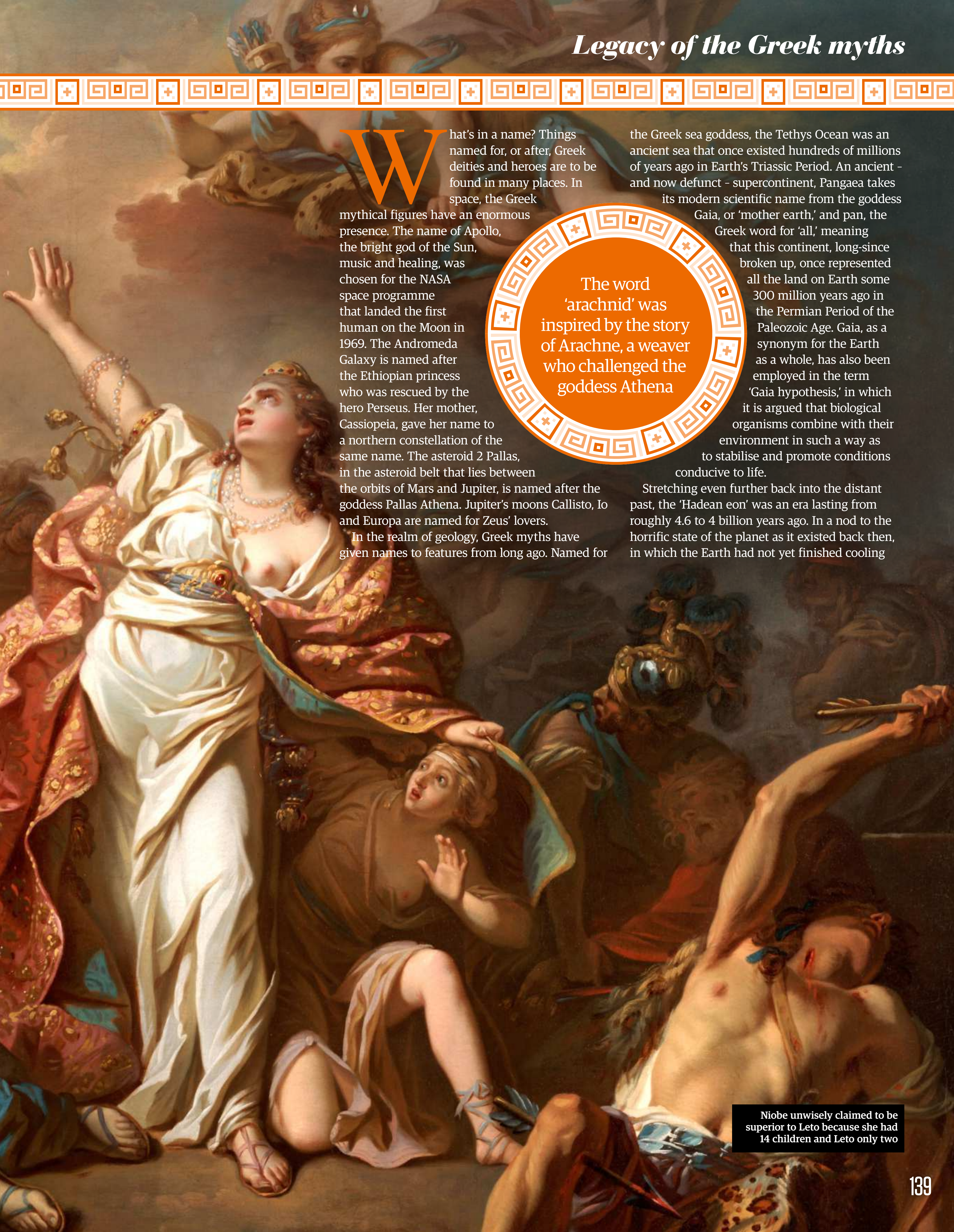
From any perspective, religious or secular, the continuing influence of Greek mythology on society is undeniable. Images of the Greek gods are common in art, architecture, and advertising. Themes of Greek myths are routinely incorporated into books and film. Few other elements in human history have exerted such profound influence on the development of modern Western civilisation.

> It appears that Mycenaean religion was the mother of the Ancient Greek religion that many of us know today

# LEGACY OF THE GREEK MYTHS

The legacy of Greek mythology is impossible to escape. We see the gods and goddesses everywhere we look, and references to them or mythological stories abound





Niobe unwisely claimed to be superior to Leto because she had 14 children and Leto only two

What's in a name? Things named for, or after, Greek deities and heroes are to be found in many places. In space, the Greek mythical figures have an enormous presence. The name of Apollo, the bright god of the Sun, music and healing, was chosen for the NASA space programme that landed the first human on the Moon in 1969. The Andromeda Galaxy is named after the Ethiopian princess who was rescued by the hero Perseus. Her mother, Cassiopeia, gave her name to a northern constellation of the same name. The asteroid 2 Pallas, in the asteroid belt that lies between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter, is named after the goddess Pallas Athena. Jupiter's moons Callisto, Io and Europa are named for Zeus' lovers.

The word 'arachnid' was inspired by the story of Arachne, a weaver who challenged the goddess Athena

In the realm of geology, Greek myths have given names to features from long ago. Named for the Greek sea goddess, the Tethys Ocean was an ancient sea that once existed hundreds of millions of years ago in Earth's Triassic Period. An ancient – and now defunct – supercontinent, Pangaea takes its modern scientific name from the goddess Gaia, or 'mother earth,' and pan, the Greek word for 'all,' meaning that this continent, long-since broken up, once represented all the land on Earth some 300 million years ago in the Permian Period of the Paleozoic Age. Gaia, as a synonym for the Earth as a whole, has also been employed in the term 'Gaia hypothesis,' in which it is argued that biological organisms combine with their environment in such a way as to stabilise and promote conditions conducive to life.

Stretching even further back into the distant past, the 'Hadean eon' was an era lasting from roughly 4.6 to 4 billion years ago. In a nod to the horrific state of the planet as it existed back then, in which the Earth had not yet finished cooling and was being routinely bombarded by asteroids, it draws its title from Hades, the god of the dead who shared his with the grim underworld realm he presided over.

Several chemical elements have acquired their names via Greek mythology. The extremely strong metallic element known as titanium is named for the mighty Titans, who were overthrown by Zeus and the other gods in a cosmic struggle for power. Promethium bears the name of the Titan Prometheus, who stole fire from Zeus and gifted it to mankind.

The element niobium acquired its name from Niobe, the overly proud mother whose children were slain because she had foolishly boasted that her 14 offspring made her superior to the goddess Leto, the mother of only two. Those two, however, just happened to be the great Olympians Apollo and Artemis, and they took murderous vengeance on behalf of their offended mother.

Military weapons and warships have also borne names drawn from Greek mythology. The US Poseidon nuclear missile took its name from the god of the sea. The US also fielded the Nike anti-aircraft missile, named after the goddess of victory. Numerous Royal Navy ships have been named after Greek gods and heroes, including HMS Agamemnon, HMS Orion, HMS Ajax, HMS Bellerophon, and myriad others. The US Navy too has named ships after the gods, including the USS Triton, USS Argus and USS Prometheus.

> "Several chemical elements have acquired their names via Greek mythology"

Figures from ancient myths have found their way into the realm of money and business. The European Union released banknotes bearing the image of Europa, the Phoenician princess who gave Europe its name. For many years the symbol of the Mobil Oil Corporation was the Pegasus, a winged horse ridden by the hero Bellerophon.

Greek deities have made a splash in the world of games too. The role-playing game *Dungeons & Dragons* included rules for the gods and goddesses of Olympus for those who wished to utilise them. Players of the game can also do battle against monsters drawn from Greek myth, including centaurs, minotaurs, harpies and the chimera, a grotesque flame-spitting creature with the head of a lion, the body of a goat and the tail of a serpent. Sony's *God of War* video game franchise, which made its first appearance in 2005, is based on Greek mythical themes.

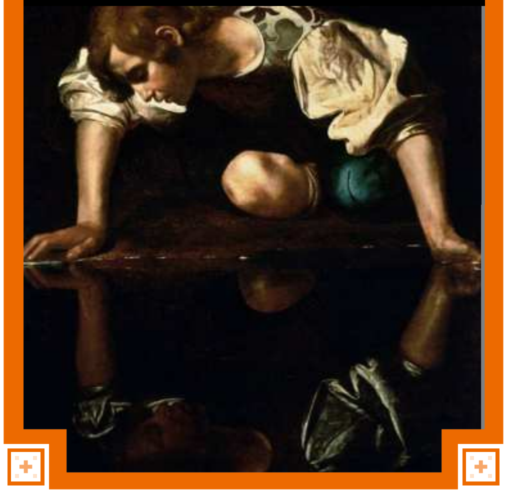
Young adult fiction has been a prominent venue for the gods of Greece. Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson & the Olympians* series has grown to encompass five novels and two feature films. In the story, Percy Jackson is the 12-year-old son of

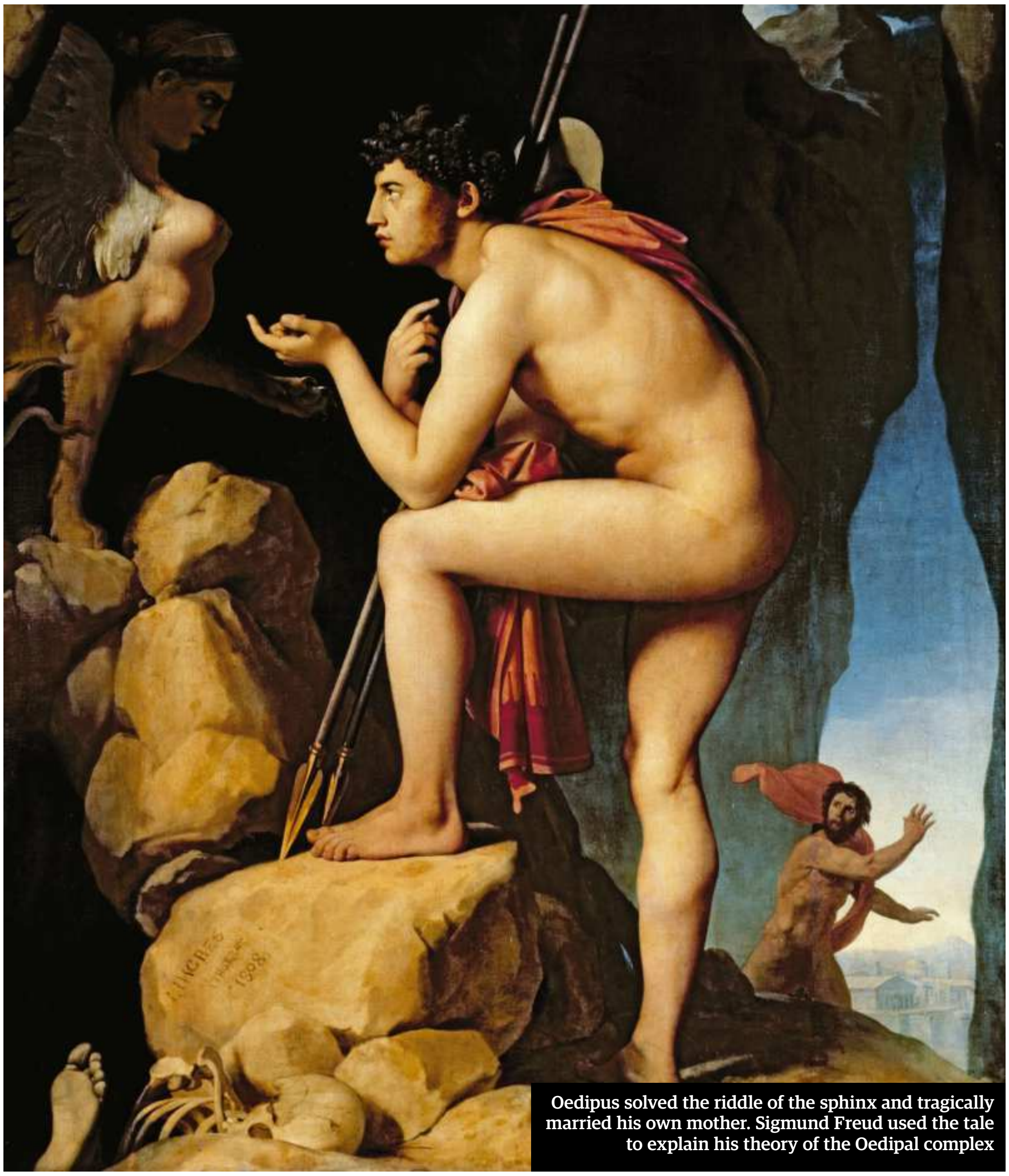
## Greek myths and the mind

Greek mythology has been mined for help in describing the psychological complexities of modern humanity. Perhaps the most famous example of this is Sigmund Freud's coinage of the 'Oedipal complex', in which a son battles with his father for the affection of his mother. The name was drawn from the tragic figure of Oedipus, who unknowingly became wed to his own mother Jocasta. A corresponding version that Freud believed affected girls was called the 'Electra complex', Electra being the daughter of Agamemnon, who avenged her father's murder by her own mother Clytemnestra.

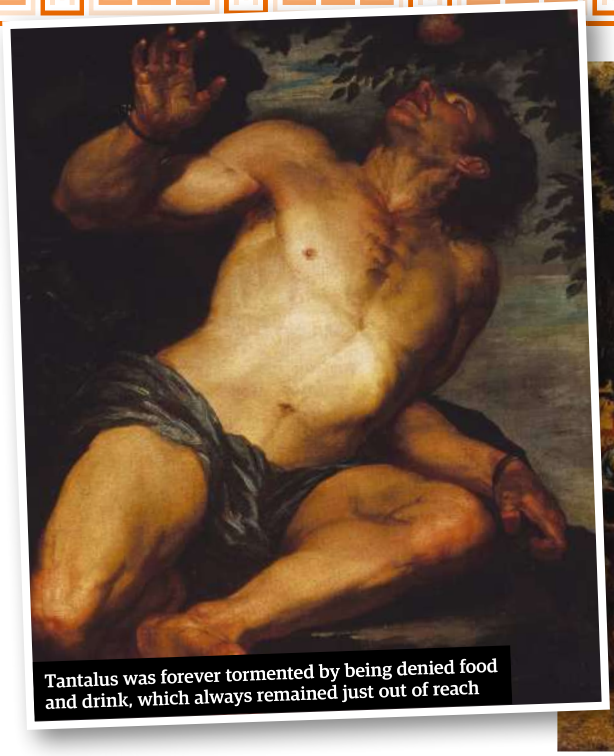
If we find a person who is filled with an overwhelming sense of self-love, we call them a 'narcissist.' This is drawn from the myth of Echo and Narcissus, in which the extremely good-looking and hugely arrogant hunter named Narcissus fell in love with his own image reflected in a pool and died from grief that he could not be united with the handsome fellow he saw.

The handsome Narcissus fell in love with his own reflection, giving rise to the term 'narcissism'

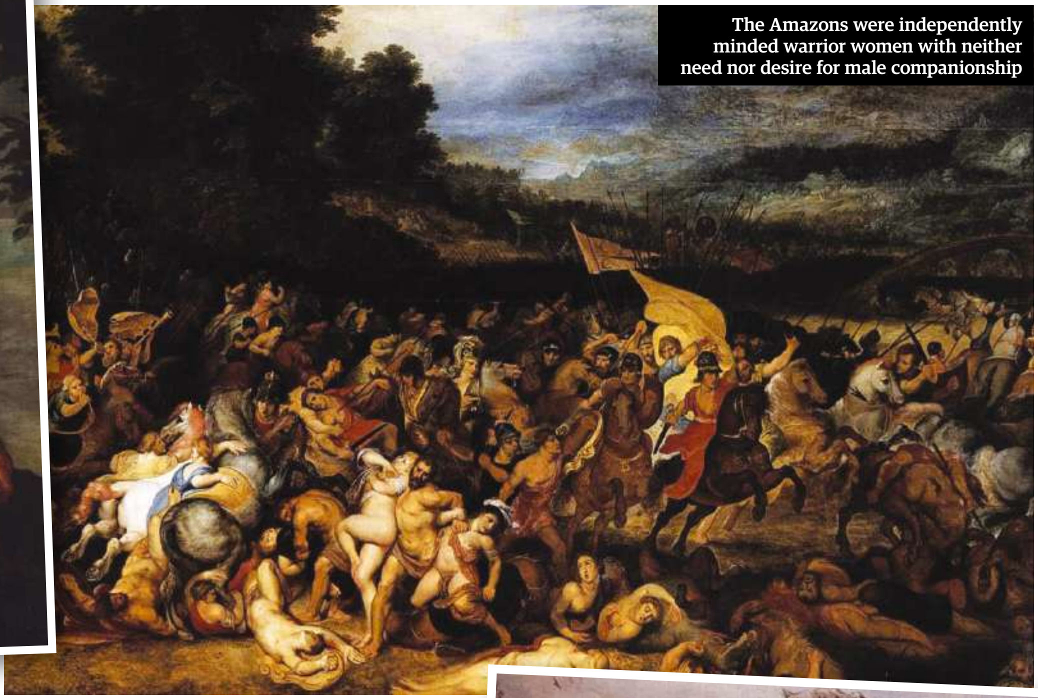




Oedipus solved the riddle of the sphinx and tragically married his own mother. Sigmund Freud used the tale to explain his theory of the Oedipal complex



Tantalus was forever tormented by being denied food and drink, which always remained just out of reach



The Amazons were independently minded warrior women with neither need nor desire for male companionship

Poseidon, the god of the sea, and he attends Camp Half-Blood, a camp for demigods like himself.

Another such demigod, Perseus, was brought to the silver screen in the classic 1981 film *Clash of the Titans*, in which the son of Zeus slays Medusa and uses her head to petrify the Kraken before it can devour the lovely Andromeda. The film features stop-motion special effects provided by the moviemaking legend Ray Harryhausen.

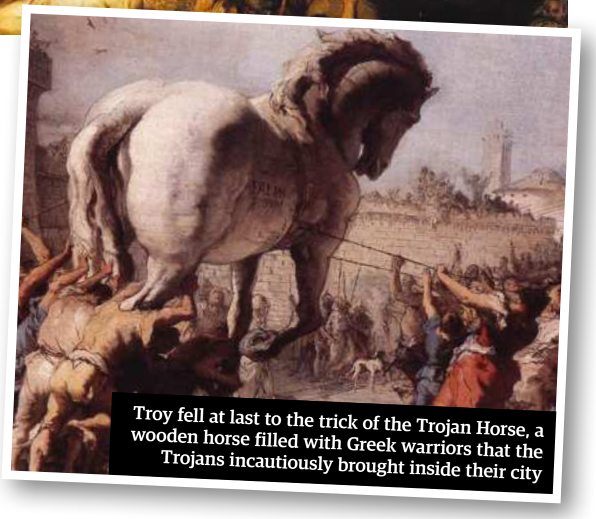
## THE LEGEND OF TROY

The story of the Trojan War, a bloody ten-year siege beneath the walls of the city of Troy in northwestern Asia Minor, continues to fascinate and has appeared in many forms in popular culture. The story is primarily known from the *Iliad*, the epic poem whose authorship is traditionally ascribed to the blind poet Homer. In the *Iliad*, the Greek heroes fight their Trojan counterparts to recover Helen, the most beautiful woman in the world. She had been the wife of Menelaus, a Greek, but was stolen away by the Trojan prince Paris and brought to Troy. This caused the Greeks to raise a mighty army to sail across the Aegean Sea to Troy to recover her.

> The origins of the word 'chronology' are found in the tale of Chronos, the god of time who produced the first generation of deities

For centuries the war was consigned to mere legend, an interesting fable but nothing more. There were those, however, who insisted that there was an element of truth to the story. One such believer was Heinrich Schliemann. Schliemann had a made a fortune in America during the early 19th century but was obsessed with the Trojan War and was determined to find Troy, the location of which had become lost since ancient times. Archaeology in the 1870s was in its infancy, and the methods that Schliemann used to dig up Troy were crude in the extreme, but they were effective. After years of digging, in 1873 he uncovered the so-called 'Treasure of Priam', named after the king of Troy in the *Iliad*. Included in the find were the 'Jewels of Helen', a golden headdress fit for a queen. Though certain confirmation that the city was actually Troy would not come until after Schliemann's death in 1890, its location had at last been uncovered.

The tale of Schliemann's and subsequent excavations of Troy was told in the 1985 BBC television series *In Search of the Trojan War*, written and presented by Michael Wood, which was accompanied by a book of the same name written by Wood. The Trojan War legend is placed within the context of the wider Aegean world of the late Bronze Age of roughly 1300-1200 BC. The Greek world of this era was dominated by the city of Mycenae, just as in the *Iliad* the many Greek heroes pay homage to Agamemnon, the king of Mycenae, as their overlord and leader of the expedition against Troy. Mycenae was mighty, but eventually the civilisation that it led collapsed. Everywhere in Greece we find evidence of the fall of cities. It is very possible that the real Trojan War was a dimly remembered military expedition by Greek chieftains waged against the wealthy city of Troy in Asia Minor.



Troy fell at last to the trick of the Trojan Horse, a wooden horse filled with Greek warriors that the Trojans incautiously brought inside their city

What followed this grander time was a 'Dark Age' in which literacy was lost and the material conditions of the people declined markedly. The greatness of the bygone era was recalled poorly but never forgotten entirely, as the story was preserved in the oral poetry of generations of bards until it was committed to paper at the dawn of Greece's rebirth in the classical period.

Homer's story has been retold many times and in many forms. In 2004, the Troy saga was turned into a major feature film entitled (appropriately enough) *Troy*, starring Brad Pitt as the doomed Achilles, Eric Bana as the Trojan prince Hector, Diane Kruger as the lovely Helen and Orlando Bloom as her feckless lover and abductor, Paris. Though the gods and goddesses are absent from *Troy*, the story nonetheless largely follows the one that was set out in Greek myth.

The early 20th-century Greek poet C P Cavafy drew upon the *Iliad* in his poem *The Funeral of Sarpedon*, Sarpedon being a hero who fought with

## A mythical lexicon

The Greek myths have contributed many words to the English language. One who changes much about human society or some aspect of culture through original, creative invention may be said to be acting in a 'Promethean' manner. This usage derives from the myth of the Titan Prometheus, who stole fire from the gods and gave it to humans so that they could cook their food and warm their homes.

'Odyssey' has found its way into the English lexicon to denote a lengthy and dramatic journey, while 'Olympian' (after Mount Olympus, where the Greek gods made their abode) is used to refer to some extremely powerful person or group. It may also refer to something of a higher grade than ordinarily seen.

When seeking to warn someone away from doing something rash that might carry unforeseen consequences we might advise against opening 'Pandora's box'. In Greek mythology, Pandora, the first woman, possessed a box containing evils that, when opened, escaped to vex mankind ever since.

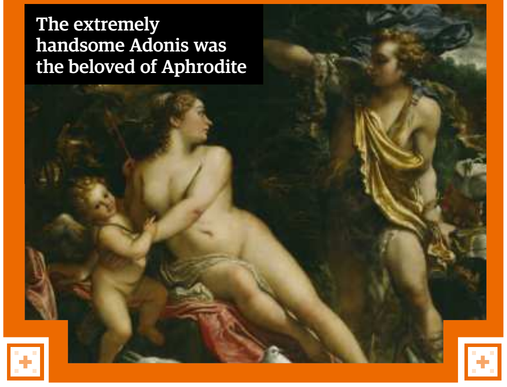
If a task is set before us that requires tremendous strength to accomplish, or one that may be completed with great difficulty, we would say that it is a 'Herculean' task after the Greek demigod Hercules, who was immensely strong. Similarly, a person possessing enormous strength or a muscular physique can be said to be 'Herculean'.

To be under the 'aegis' of something means to be under its protection or authority. The aegis was the awesomely stout goatskin that Zeus used in battle. Speaking of appearances, a very handsome man may be said to be an 'Adonis', after the hunter who won the love of the goddesses Aphrodite and Persephone.

When a person is 'tantalised', he desires something very much but can't have it. This comes from the myth of Tantalus, a wicked man whose punishment in the Underworld was to stand in a pool with water reaching his chin and grapes hanging from a branch above him. Whenever Tantalus attempted to drink the water level fell, so that he could not get even a sip. Whenever he reached up for the grapes the branch drew away to just out of his grasp.

Food also figures in two other words coming from Greek myth: ambrosia and nectar. Delicious food may be likened to 'ambrosia', which was the food the gods ate. The drink of the gods – 'nectar' – is what honeybees collect from flowers.

Memory of the Amazons has long outlasted the ancient world. The 'Amazon' River and its surrounding territory gained its name from the legendary female warriors whom the Spanish conquistadors claimed to have encountered there in the early 16th century.



The extremely handsome Adonis was the beloved of Aphrodite

the Trojans against the Greeks before meeting his death in battle. More recently, the Trojan War was taken up in the eight-episode 2018 series *Troy: Fall of a City*, a co-production by BBC One and Netflix.

The war before Troy has also been mined for inspiration in literature. Author Dan Simmons used the ancient war as inspiration in his 2003 science fiction novel *Ilium*, in which he imagines the Trojan War being refought for the amusement of the 'gods' on a future planet Mars.

The Trojan War as described by Homer has also helped to shed light on the mental anguish suffered by modern soldiers. In his 1995 *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character*, author Jonathan Shay compared the ancient wartime experiences of Homer's warriors with American soldiers who had fought in Southeast Asia. Both groups of men suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder resulting from their personal encounters with the savagery of war.

> Considered the most deadly creature in Greek mythology and the god of storms, Typhon aptly lends his name to 'typhoon'

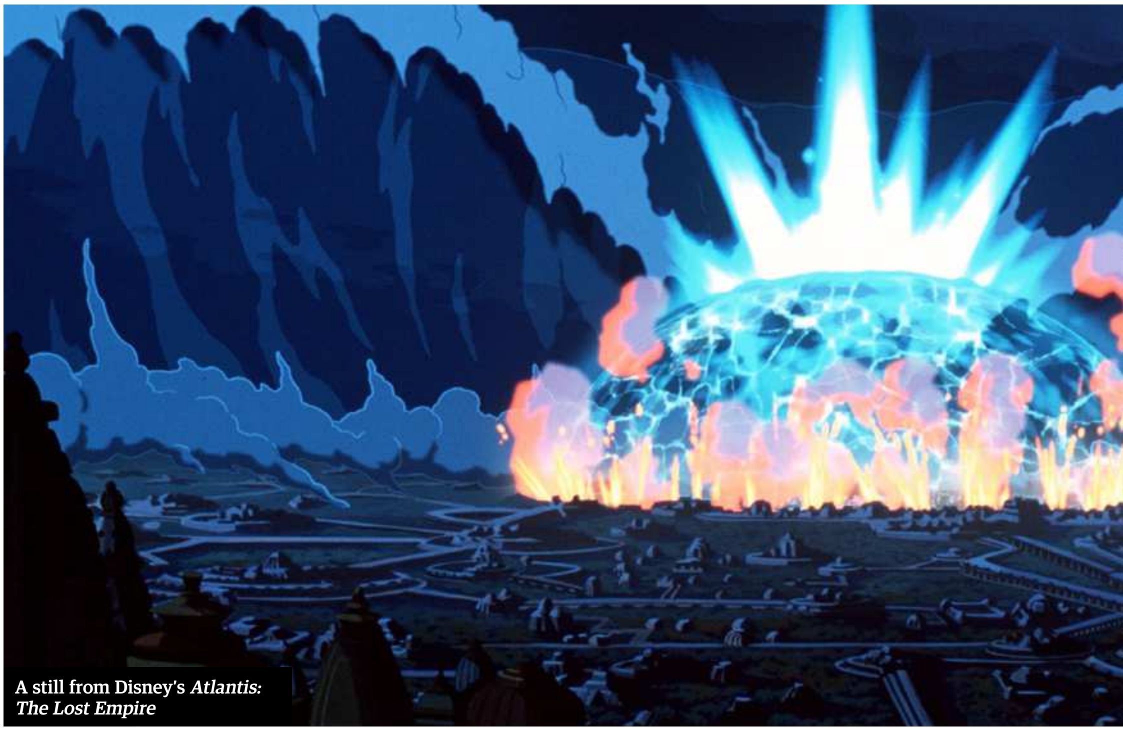
### DROWNED ATLANTIS

The mythical sunken city of Atlantis is just as compelling as that of Troy. The legend was brought to television in MGM's *Stargate* science-fiction franchise. It is learned first in *Stargate SG-1* by members of the Earth's supersecret Stargate programme that Atlantis is real and that it was a city built by a highly advanced alien people known as the 'Ancients'. The Ancients hid the city beneath an ocean (thus giving rise to the ancient myth in Greek mythology) on a planet in the distant Pegasus Galaxy.

This nugget of myth served as the starting point for an entirely new television series entitled *Stargate: Atlantis*, which ran from 2004 to 2009. Atlantis can be reached via a stargate, and a long-term expedition is organised to travel there. The target destination, however, is so far away that they will be forced to rely on themselves for the foreseeable future. Upon arrival they discover that Atlantis is technologically superior to whatever Earth has but that it is also extremely old. They make many fearsome enemies while exploring the Pegasus Galaxy and are forced to survive without support from Earth in their new home.

Disney brought its own unique cinematic magic to the ancient legend in 2001's *Atlantis: The Lost Empire*. In this animated feature film, voices are supplied by Michael J. Fox, Leonard Nimoy, James Garner, Claudia Christian and others. In the story it is 1914 and the main character, young Milo Thatch, thinks he has discovered the way to Atlantis. A team from the surface world takes a voyage aboard the submarine Ulysses (the name of the submarine is itself a nod to Greek myth as it is an alternative name for Odysseus) to find the underwater realm.

The story of Atlantis has resonated for centuries, ever since the Greek philosopher Plato wrote about it in the 4th century BC in his works entitled *Timaeus and Critias*. Whether there is truth behind



A still from Disney's *Atlantis: The Lost Empire* the story of Atlantis is a question that has often been asked in modern times. According to Plato, Atlantis was sited to the west of the Straits of Gibraltar, in what is today known as the Atlantic Ocean. Indeed, 'Atlantic' is derived from Greek, meaning 'Sea of Atlantis'. Plato believed it to have sunk beneath the waves some 9,000 years before the date of his writing. Plato also wrote that the people of the island grew wicked and their island was pummelled by earthquakes, which caused it to sink under the sea.

J R R Tolkien, the author of *The Lord of the Rings*, drew upon the Atlantis story when creating his own legendarium for Middle-earth. In *The Silmarillion*, Tolkien imagined the glorious island realm of Númenor, which, like Atlantis, lay in the ocean to the west of Middle-earth. The Númenóreans reached the pinnacle of human cultural achievement before (like the Atlanteans) they too fell to evil ways and were punished by having their island sunk under them.

The search for the real Atlantis has inspired many over the years. Author and American congressman Ignatius L Donnelly wrote in his 1882 *Atlantis: The Antediluvian World* that all human civilisations descended from the legendary island state. In recent years, modern science has suggested that the idea of a lost, ruined island may have its origins in the volcanic destruction of the island of Thera in the Aegean Sea. Geological evidence suggest that a cataclysmic eruption occurred on the island around 1600 BC. Thera had been inhabited previously by culturally sophisticated people partaking in the Minoan civilisation centred on nearby Crete. Almost overnight their home had been devastated, smothered beneath a layer of volcanic ash. This may well have been the source of the idea that gave rise to the legend of Atlantis.

> "J R R Tolkien drew upon the Atlantis story when creating Middle-earth"

## WARRIOR PRINCESSES

Fighting women with ties to Greek myth have won significant screen time in recent years. There was notably the campy fun of *Xena: Warrior Princess*, starring Lucy Lawless as Xena battling for justice across the length and breadth of Greece. The show's ties to Greek myth were often somewhat tenuous, but they were usually real. Running from 1995 to 2001, Xena regularly encountered the gods and goddesses of myth on a regular basis.

Few elements of ancient Greek myth have fascinated people more than the legendary Amazons, fierce warrior women who rejected all male company except for the requirements of procreation. Female babies, the myth ran, were kept and raised as Amazons, while male children were given over to their fathers.

One fictional Amazon with a long pedigree is Wonder Woman, the superhero warrior princess of the Amazons. Wonder Woman was the invention of William Moulton Marston, with her first appearance in comics coming in December 1941. A princess of Paradise Island, she battled Nazis alongside American soldiers. Wonder Woman was brought to the small screen in 1975, with Lynda Carter as Diana Prince, this being the secret identity of Wonder Woman. Together with the brave and handsome Captain Steve Trevor, played by Lyle Waggoner, she again battles the Nazis, with the action switching to the 1970s in subsequent series of the show.

Without a doubt, the most recent and notable appearance of this character was in the 2017 film *Wonder Woman* starring Gal Gadot (a former combat instructor) as the Amazon princess and superhero from the hidden island of Themiscyra. The setting is now that of the First World War. Together with the intrepid American pilot and secret agent Captain Trevor, played by Chris Pine, she works to prevent the German general Ludendorff from unleashing a terrible poison gas weapon on the Allies. She also sees the world war as the work of Ares, the evil god of war who brings conflict to mankind and with whom she knows she must eventually do battle.

This version of Wonder Woman was especially notable for its box office triumph because it successfully introduced an exceptionally strong female character into the traditionally male preserve of superhero films.

As in the case of Troy and Atlantis, there seems to have been a kernel of historical truth about the Amazons embedded inside the larger legend. The mythical Amazons were associated in the Greek imagination with the nomadic peoples of the south Russian steppes. Modern archaeology suggests that many women of the Sarmatian people fought with weapons and participated in battle. Many burials of women on the steppe contain weapons in them. Greek women of the time did not bear arms, and women doing any kind of fighting would have been shocking to the Greek mind. This Sarmatian practice may very well have been the seed of the Amazon myth among the Greeks.

**Gal Gadot starring in the 2017 hit *Wonder Woman***

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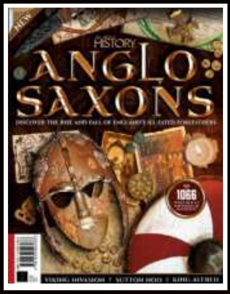
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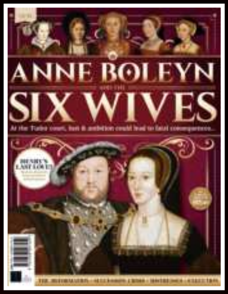
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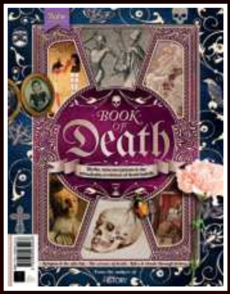
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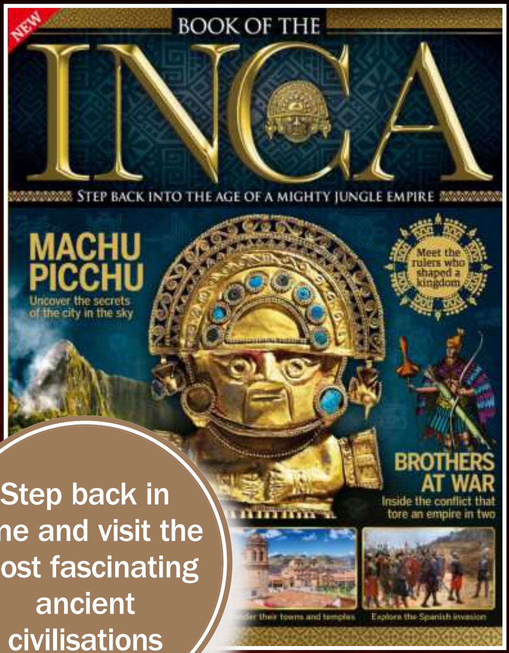
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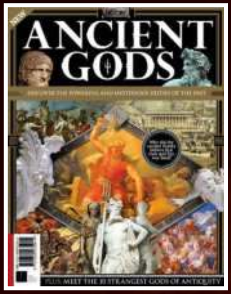
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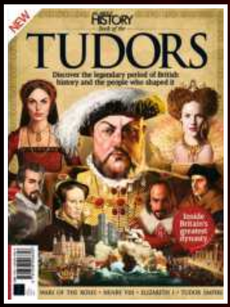

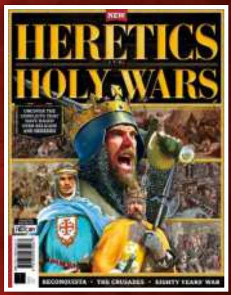
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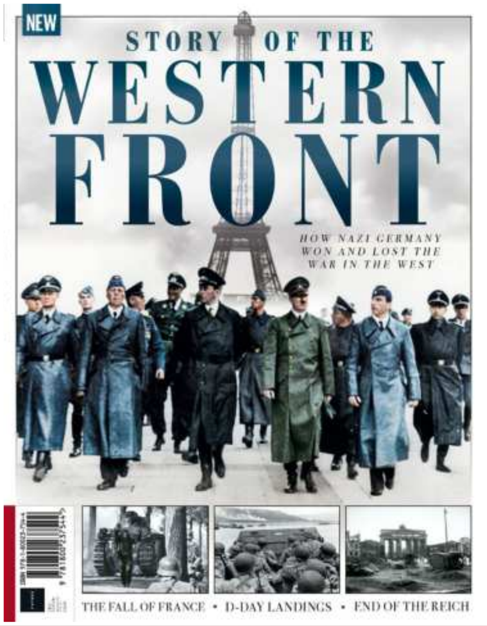
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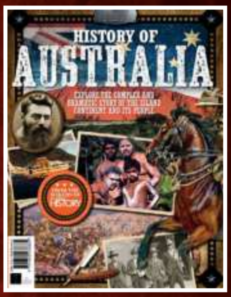
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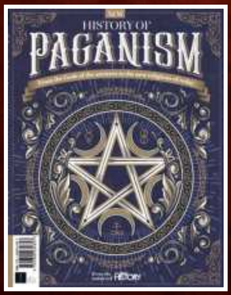
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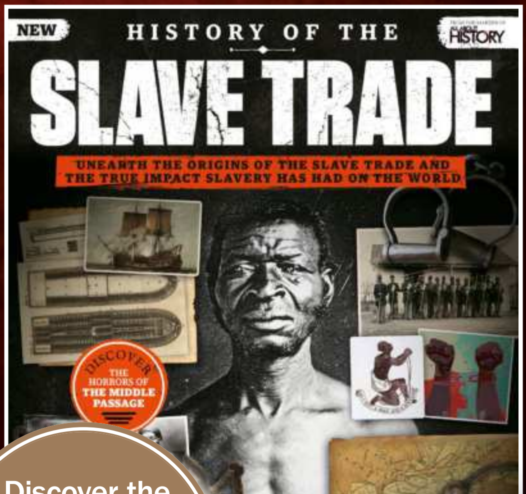
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